

PC IN OUR TIME

January 8-21, 1996

IN THESE TIMES

DEMOCRACY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Will Russia go
back to the future?

FRED WEIR

VLADIMIR KLIMENKO

\$2.50/CANADA \$3.00



EDITORIAL

LEANER AND MEANER

Four weeks ago we noted how Newt Gingrich blamed the welfare system for the murder of a pregnant woman by a sterile couple who wanted her baby. Speaking to Republican governors at a New Hampshire gathering, Newt implied that this unspeakable act resulted from "the moral decay of the world [that] the left is defending." We suggested that our pervasive corporate culture, in which the tyranny of the bottom line overrides all social considerations, was a more likely cause. To illustrate our contention, we cited Shell Oil's denial of responsibility for Nigeria's execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others who criticized the corporation's poisoning of their Ogoni homeland. The company, a Shell official said glibly, is an "amoral, profit-seeking" enterprise, not a vehicle "for political or ethical judgments." Shell's only responsibility, he explained, is to do "whatever it finds most convenient and profitable for its shareholders." In Ken Saro-Wiwa's case that meant acquiescing in the elimination of a thorn in its side.

To some, our alternative interpretation of American society's increasing disregard for human life may have seemed a bit of a stretch. If so, consider the more recent case of the killing in Oregon of Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill, a lesbian couple. They were murdered on December 4 by Robert James Acremant, a 27-year-old Californian. No welfare recipient, Acremant had a master's degree in business administration from Golden Gate University and had quit a \$40,000-a-year job because he viewed it as a dead end. Arrested for the double murder, Acremant volunteered that he had also killed his friend Scott George in October. All three killings, he said, were the result of his failure to become a rich man. He had often thought of killing people to get money. While in the Air Force, he told his buddies, "If I ever get desperate I could always go shoot some people and just take what they got." Interviewed by Steven Chin of the *San Francisco Examiner*, Acremant explained that "It's the American way. ... It's what this country is built on, taking from others."

Robbery, however, was not the motive in these killings. Nor, Acremant said, did he kill Ellis and Abdill because they

were lesbians. He was just stressed out because nobody would hire him after he quit his job at Roadway Trucking in Los Angeles—and because he couldn't keep up with his Las Vegas girlfriend, who "liked living like the upper class." Angry about his circumstances, he impulsively shot his victims and moved on, unconcerned.

Acremant's murders, like the baby-snatching murders in Illinois, are both examples of acquisitive individualism gone awry. They are, of course, aberrations. But they are also byproducts of American corporate capitalism. The move from Shell Oil to Robert Acremant is a sick, albeit short, step, one that the Republican-dominated Congress unwittingly

encourages by its malign disregard for the well-being of the American people.

Nor is increasingly violent crime only a domestic phenomenon. As the *Chicago Tribune* reported in late December, a crime wave is washing over Eastern Europe, where capitalism is "bringing American-style woes." As the *Tribune* explained, the imposition of American ideas about unrestrained free markets has suddenly opened a yawning chasm between rich and poor in the formerly Communist countries. As some "smart entrepreneurs and some crooks grew rich rapidly," poverty and the fear of poverty grew alongside. And with this change, violence related to money has also

The "amoral" aims of American business are rending the nation's social fabric.

grown. In Poland, for example, the number of killings has more than doubled since 1989, and similar increases have occurred in Hungary and the Czech Republic.

One Polish police officer called this process Americanization, "the ominous aspect of life in the U.S. that no one in Poland wants to see at home." And other Poles wonder whether the Eastern countries will continue to follow the United States, or whether they will "follow the path of Western Europe, with its relatively low rates of violent crime."

And why does Western Europe have low rates of violent crime? There are several reasons, but the main one is that most of these countries have highly developed welfare states—with universal public health care, public child-care programs, high-paying unemployment insurance, large-scale public housing programs, free or low-cost higher education and highly developed public transportation. In short, all the things that Gingrich, et al, are trying to eliminate entirely while they give tax rebates to the wealthiest Americans. ◀

IN THESE TIMES
 "...with liberty and justice for all"

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BY FRED WEIR

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Debunking the dire predictions about Russia's upcoming presidential election.

VLADIMIR KLIMENKO

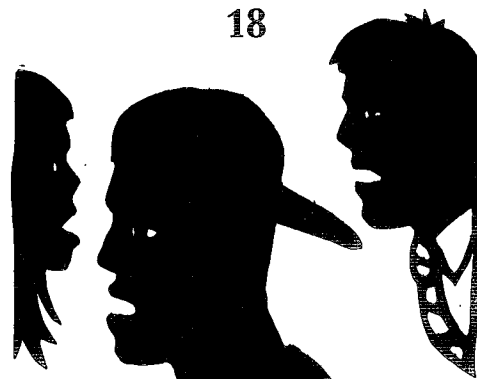
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PC in our time

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L E T T E R S

Too cool

Thank you for running Will Nixon's piece on global warming, "The heat is on" (December 11). As of this writing, *In These Times* is the first progressive publication to give this issue the time of day. Nixon convincingly marshals evidence that global warming is already causing serious ecological harm.

However, the article's grasp of current scientific understanding leaves something to be desired; in both content and tone it is far too timorous. To call the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change a "loose" coalition and to say that the panel's report may overstate the level of consensus on the seriousness of global warming is to participate in the minimizing of the issue that the article then decries. In fact, a huge majority of climate scientists now agrees that serious climate change is under way and is likely to

grow much more severe. It is true that vast uncertainties remain about how the Earth's climate system will respond to continued greenhouse-gas emissions. But these are causes for more concern, not less.

For instance, climate scientist Wallace Broecker and others have warned that uncontrolled global heating could set in motion a drastic shift of Atlantic Ocean currents, leading to catastrophic *cold* in much of Europe and violently abrupt climate changes elsewhere. This, like sundry other possible catastrophies, may be relatively unlikely. But ask yourself: Would you want someone to play Russian roulette even if only *one* of six gun cartridges contained a bullet?

Your article, in sum, does help break the silence with which too many of us have greeted recent evidence of global warming. But, like too many pieces, it is overly—indeed, irresponsibly—cautious in its charac-

terization of scientific concern about the issue. That's not very progressive.

Michael Perlman
Williamsburg, Mass.

So what is PR?

With regard to "Voting Matters" (November 27): If you're going to devote two whole pages to the subject of proportional representation, mightn't it be a good idea to say exactly what proportional representation is? After reading the piece, I asked four people what is meant by the term: my daughter, my son-in-law, the perpetually overloaded postman who probably wishes I lived in another town and my next-door neighbor who kindly clears the snow from my driveway. They all thought they sort of knew what proportional representation means, but when put on the spot they weren't so sure.

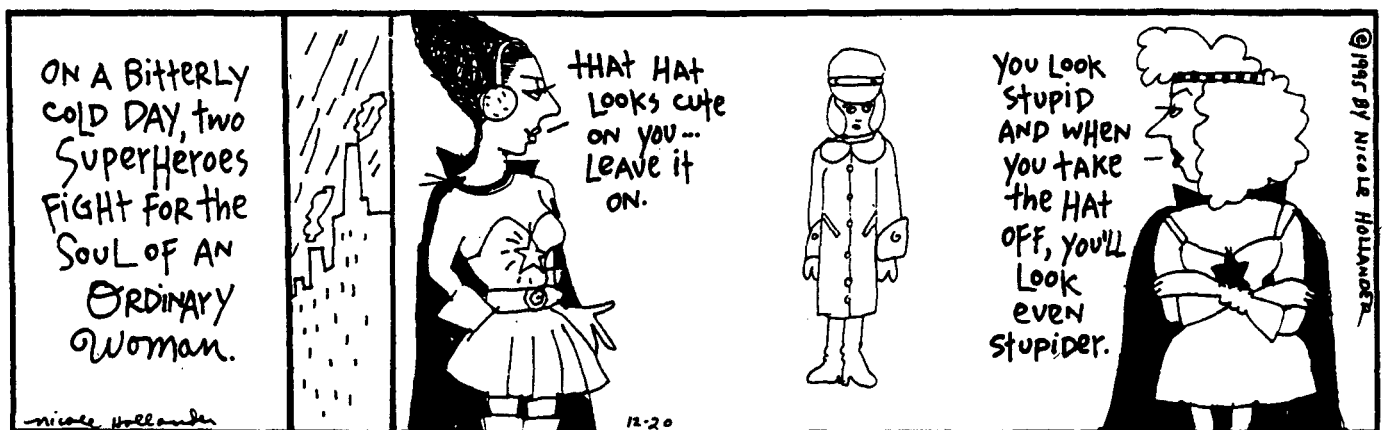
In These Times might have a wider readership if it didn't (unconsciously) address itself primarily to the cognoscenti—of which I am not, alas, a member.

Frieda Arkin
Ipswich, Mass.

Editor's note: Your point is well taken. Here is an all too brief explanation of the subject. Proportional representation (PR) is a voting system designed to create legislative bodies in which the proportions among members roughly

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



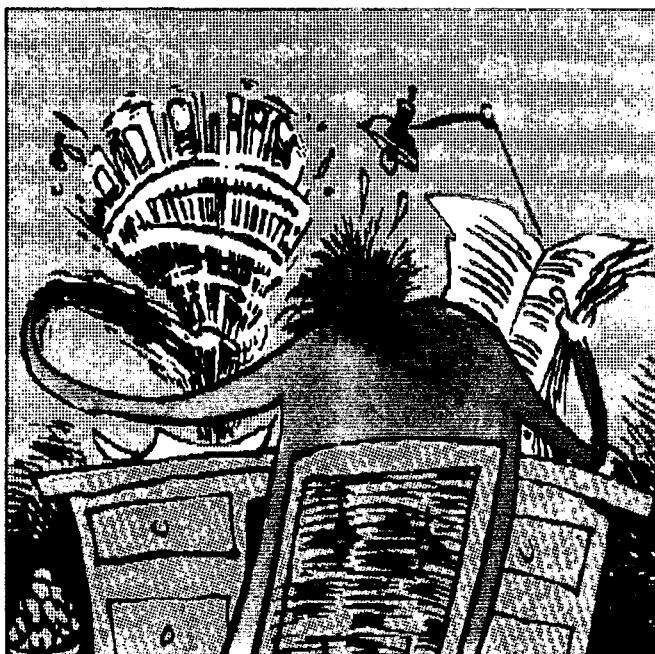
reflect their support among the electorate. In Europe, PR has worked primarily to create fair representation along lines of class and political ideology. Recently, some reformers in the United States have advocated PR as a way to achieve better representation for racial or ethnic minorities, the idea being that in a community with 30 percent African-Americans, a similar percentage should be elected to office. In a single-member majority system this would rarely happen, since the 30 percent is a losing percentage in a district that's 70 percent white. But if districts were made larger and had several candidates chosen from them, a preferential system of voting—one of which is described in the following letter—would provide representation to each group.

Another PR method

Joel Bleifuss' article on proportional representation was very interesting, but it left out a European voting model that could change politics for the better: the single-transferable ballot.

Under this system, one essentially ranks some or all candidates in a given order of preference. For example, 1) Socialist, 2) Green, 3) Democrat, 4) Libertarian, leaving in this case Republican and, say, Christian coalition off the ballot. If, as votes are tallied, the Socialist candidate is shut out, the vote is transferred to the Green candidate. If it then becomes clear that the Green candidate cannot win, the vote goes to the Democrat. This system allows voters to express their true alliances without "wasting" a vote on a candidate that is sure not to win; in the end one can support the "lesser of two evils" without foregoing the chance win of an independent candidate.

This system encourages multiple parties, no matter how small, which in turn



widen the spectrum of debate—arguably what we need most in the United States. It also makes for a more effective protest vote: If everyone who is fed up with the government put, say, Mickey Mouse as first preference, a powerful message would indeed be sent.

Christopher Bull
Worcester, Mass.

Trash talking

Joel Bleifuss' piece on recycling ("Pavlov's pack rats," November 13) was disappointing. He proudly announces his refusal to recycle in the name of environmentalism, and states that those who recycle are "deluded." Bleifuss' point seems to be that because the recycling of packaging helps make people feel better about packaging, recycling is evil. An ancillary point is that as long as businesses are not doing the right thing, individuals shouldn't either.

Bleifuss might be surprised to learn that Keep America Beautiful (KAB), an organization he accuses—rightly—of phony environmentalism, is also trying to convince the public that recycling is the wrong thing to do. KAB released a widely publicized report earlier this year that similarly tried to convince the public that recycling is the wrong thing

to do. Using inaccurate and incomplete data, the report exaggerated the environmental and financial cost of recycling. It indicted curbside residential recycling as inefficient, expensive and environmentally harmful. After the environmental community questioned KAB's motives and critiqued the report, the consulting firm they hired was embarrassed into redoing the study with more accurate data. They found that recycling does pay both environmental and financial dividends.

Yes, it would be better if businesses were more environmentally accountable. And yes, the only way to move businesses is through public campaigns. But what better way to get folks to recognize the need for reducing and reusing packaging than to have them sort their garbage. And in the meantime, effective residential recycling helps the local economy and the environment.

Anne Irving
Executive Director,
Chicago Recycling Coalition
Chicago

Correction

In the November 13 story "The enemy within," a quote from epidemiologist Shauna Swan was garbled. The quote should have read, "Usually when you have a new toxic exposure that the body is not used to, the body responds in new ways, such as toxic shock syndrome and DES."

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

INSHORT



EQUALITY OR BUST

Since November, mailbags in the nation's capital have been bursting with tens of thousands of postcards bearing a message for the federal government: "Washington—Get a grip!" But the postcards aren't addressed to legislators battling over the budget. They're aimed at officials of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which has been investigating charges of discriminatory hiring practices at Hooters of America, Inc.—the restaurant chain famous for its scantily clad waitresses.

In an attempt to paint the ongoing EEOC investigation as an absurd government intrusion into the operations of a legitimate business, the chain has poured an estimated \$750,000 into a national media blitz. At Hooters' 172 outlets nationwide, customers are offered postcards (postage paid and pre-addressed to congressmen and EEOC commissioners) castigating the agency for pursuing a frivolous investigation at taxpayer expense.

The mainstream media have largely swallowed Hooters' legal stance—that under "the bona fide occupational qualification" exception to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, hiring people of "a certain gender or ethnicity" is legal

if that gender or ethnicity is essential to the job requirements. For example, a French restaurant has the right to hire only French waiters. The Hooters legal team has compared its restaurants to the now-defunct Playboy Clubs, which were granted an exception allowing them to hire only female "bunnies."

"Quite simply," says Hooters Vice President Mike McNeil, "the women and their all-American female sex appeal make Hooters what it is."

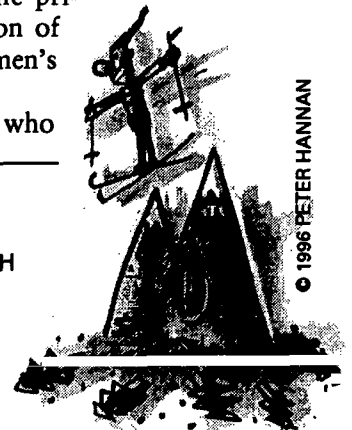
But as Steven Saltzman, the attorney in a Chicago class action suit pending against Hooters, puts it, "How can the essence of their business be sex appeal when they have a children's menu?"

In fact, as Hooters' critics are quick to note, Playboy received an exception because the federal courts determined that food service was in no way the primary function of the upscale men's clubs.

Saltzman, who

Going for the gold

UTAH'S SEN. ORRIN HATCH IS PUSHING A BILL THROUGH Congress that would give 1,320 acres of National Forest Service land at the base of the Snowbasin ski resort to the resort's owner, the Sun Valley Co. The bill, which circumvents Forest Service procedure, waives environmental regulations that would have governed how these public lands will be developed into ski lodges, luxury homes and a corporate training center. The owner of the Sun Valley company is R. Earl Holding, president of Sinclair Oil. The Center for Responsive Politics reports that from January 1979 to June 1995, Holding, his family, and executives for his companies distributed \$111,320 in contributions of \$200 or more to candidates for federal office. Top on the gift list was Hatch with \$9,750. Why does Holding want control of those 1,320 acres? Snowbasin will be the venue for six of the 12 alpine events in the 2002 Winter Olympics. There is gold in those hills. —Joel Bleifuss

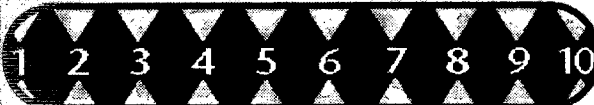


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APPALL-O-METER

THE IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



Closing the Gates 8.1

Let them eat Win-
dows 95. According to
the *New York Observer*,
cyberbillionaire Bill Gates
doesn't donate money to
charity because, in his
words, "I'm in a phase
for the next 10 years
where my work is my pri-
mary contribution. The
time of funding other
things is some time off."

Naughty and nice 3.4

Parents worried that
their children are being
corrupted by decadent
technicians can now sub-
scribe to a new maga-
zine called *Entertainment
Monitor*, designed to sort
out the pure from the
filthy in popular culture.
The magazine offers
translations of ribald (if
somewhat confusing)
rap lyrics, as well as
warnings about "poten-
tially offensive language"
in recordings by none
other than Garth Brooks.
And it offers recommen-

dations for records (by
performers such as
Michael Bolton) that
contain "nothing seem-
ingly offensive." Accord-
ing to the Associated
Press, the editor, Charles
Gilreath "got the idea
for the magazine when
he heard his 11-year-old
stepdaughter singing
along to a song with
slang references to oral
sex." The song itself was
not specified. "Some Day
My Prince Will Come"?

Red-nosed Santa 6.5

One of Santa's helpers in
Washington DC recently
found himself accosted
by police after leading a
group of carolers in song
outside a dinner for the

handicapped, the *San
Francisco Examiner*
reports. After a neighbor
complained about the
noise, the police arrived
to arrest Salvatore Gon-
zalez, who at the time
was in full costume,
wearing a red suit and
Santa beard. Santa never
stood a chance. Accord-
ing to Gonzalez, an offi-
cer told him to shut up,
"threw me against the
wall and he was grab-
bing me by the Santa
suit and he was shaking
me. [Then] he tried to
tackle me, punched me
in the mouth and started
kicking me."

*Stunned by a stupid
statement? Nauseated by
a noxious news story?
Contact the Appall-O-
Meter, c/c In These Times,
2040 N. Milwaukee Ave.,
Chicago, IL 60647. Please
enclose a copy of the
appalling item.*



represents male job applicants claim-
ing Hooters discriminated against
them, likens his case to sex-discrimina-
tion suits filed by prospective flight
attendants in the '60s and '70s.

Like "Hooters Girls" today, stew-
ardesses were then used "as marketing
tools," says Jill Gallagher of the Asso-
ciation of Flight Attendants. But the
lawsuits forced airlines to change their
employment practices and hire men.

In the short run, some observers

believe the Hooters postcard campaign
may backfire. "The fact that Hooters
attacked a public agency rather than
politicians is unprecedented," says
Martha Burk, editor of the Washing-
ton Feminist Faxnet. "I don't think a
corporate campaign will make the
EEOC [which has yet to formally file a
suit] back off. If anything, it'll
strengthen their spines. This case goes
to their basic mission."

But whatever its legal merits, Hoot-

ers' high-profile crusade has largely
succeeded in making a mockery of the
EEOC, undermining the agency's pub-
lic credibility and further tarnishing the
idea of federal action against discrimi-
nation. Forbidden from discussing
ongoing investigations, the EEOC
hasn't even attempted to mount a
counter-campaign. And so far, few
progressives have effectively articula-
ted the principles at stake in the
agency's investigation.

But Paula McKenzie, a communica-
tions consultant for progressive non-
profits, believes a loose-knit alliance of
nonprofit organizations could "pool
their resources" and mount an effec-
tive public relations effort against cor-
porations like Hooters.

Gallagher says one possible model
for such a campaign might be found in
a recent flight attendants' victory. In
1994, the group challenged and over-
turned a United Airlines policy impos-
ing narrow weight limits on its flight
attendants. A key to that victory, Gal-
lagher says, was a high-profile publici-
ty campaign that made very strong
anti-discrimination arguments.

Should Hooters and the EEOC ever
meet in court, perhaps progressives can
prove that the restaurants' glossy post-
card isn't the only message capable of
turning heads.

—Thacher Schmid

BEYOND BREAD AND BUTTER

It's much too early to tell what histo-
rians will say about the public-sector
strike that paralyzed France for more
than three weeks late last year, but for
the moment it appears to have a dou-
ble and contradictory meaning. In
terms of concrete achievements, the
strike was hardly a major triumph for
labor. But after many years of seeming
lethargy, the action can justly be seen
as a vigorous return of France's labor
movement to the political scene—espe-
cially since the movement's immediate

demands focused not just on bread-and-butter issues but more basically on the future of the country's social and economic system.

At least for the time being, labor has forced the government to withdraw its scheme to modify the retirement plans of public-sector employees and impose austerity measures on rail workers. But the post-strike "social summit" that brought together Prime Minister Alain Juppé and union representatives on December 21 ended in an inconclusive standoff. Juppé could not be dissuaded from his project to overhaul France's national health program and absorb its deficit with a regressive income tax.

Intent on meeting the stiff budget guidelines required to initiate the common European currency in 1997, Juppé has called his deficit-reduction plan "the only possible policy." Since parliamentary opposition is minimal (with the French left having been reduced in 1993 to a mere sixth of National Assembly seats), Juppé is

now in the process of ramming his measure through the legislature.

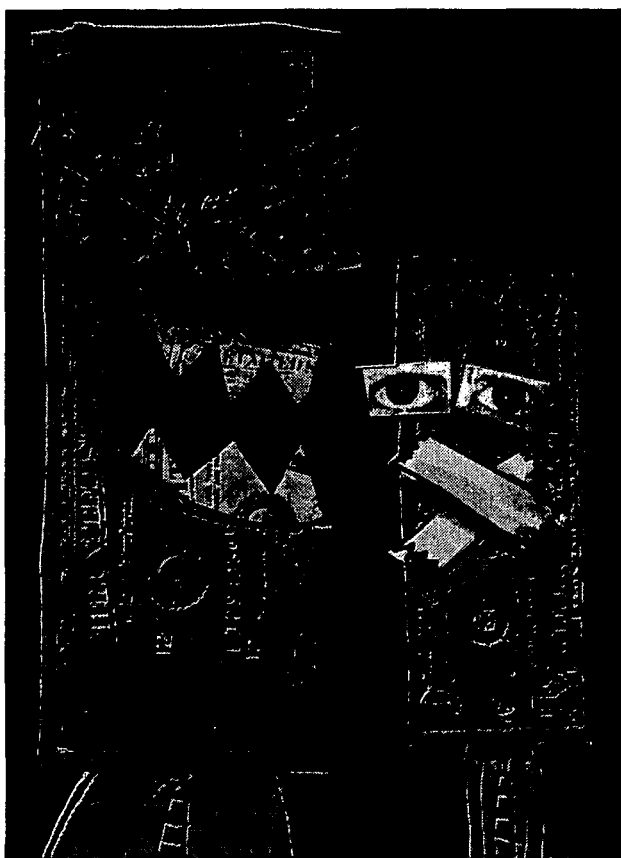
Nevertheless, Juppé can no longer take for granted that his plan will meet with public approval, or even apathy. The unions largely succeeded in convincing the public that the strike concerned not just the fate of public-sector workers, but the whole conception of the state as a rampart of social solidarity in the face of market forces. Clearly, many French people fear that the European Union, as currently conceived, will threaten the role of the French state as a guarantor of basic social services. Even though millions of ordinary citizens, especially in the Paris region, were deeply inconvenienced by the public transit shutdowns and monumental traffic jams, opinion polls consistently showed that a majority of the French sympathized with the strikers.

A key feature of the strike was its democratic character. Although French unions represent only a tiny minority of workers (roughly 8 percent), efforts were made in nearly every workplace

to include all employees in the decision about whether to strike and for how long. As many observers noted, this was a sign that French labor's "vanguardist" culture has undergone a sea change.

At the social summit, Juppé—whose own allies had criticized his intransigence during the strike—tried to appear more conciliatory. He pledged, for example, to make strong efforts to create 250,000 new jobs for youths by the end of 1996. However, he sidestepped many of the issues union leaders were hoping to raise—first and foremost, of course, the preservation of the current health care program. But Juppé may not be able to skirt those issues indefinitely. Louis Viannet, general secretary of the Confédération Générale du Travail and a key actor in the strike, warned as he emerged from the summit that "while the methods of the struggle may change, the movement is not over."

—James A. Cohen



Sore loser? No, poor loser

LAST MONTH IN MANHATTAN, ARGUMENTS BEGAN IN A FEDERAL case that could overthrow the current system of financing congressional campaigns. The case is being brought by fourteen plaintiffs—all nonwealthy voters of New York's 13th Congressional District—who maintain that today's campaign finance system is unconstitutional because it gives the rich disproportionate influence in the election process. They argue that the current system denies their equal participation in the electoral process much as the now-unconstitutional poll tax once excluded poor voters. A lead plaintiff in the case, which is being heard by the U.S. Court of Appeals in Manhattan's second circuit, is Sal Albanese, a Democratic New York City councilperson, who lost his 1992 race in the 13th District to Republican Susan Molinari. Albanese spent \$240,000 in the campaign while Molinari spent \$580,000. "The case is about this nation's constitutional promise of democracy," says Albanese. "The current campaign finance system in congressional elections has completely undermined our fundamental right to participate in the electoral process on an equal and meaningful basis." This is the first case in which a federal appellate court will address whether the campaign finance system violates the equal protection rights of nonwealthy voters. —JB

MEDIA WATCH

BY JENNIFER GONNERMAN

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A still-born debate

There is perhaps no better example of the Republicans' ability to twist the terms of public debate than the recent hoopla over federal legislation banning a rare, late-term abortion technique.

By inventing the gruesome term "partial birth" abortion to describe a procedure they hope to ban, anti-choicers have manipulated the media in a way that is far more effective than angry op-eds and letters to the editor. By dictating the very words used by the press, anti-choicers helped successfully push their bill through both the House and Senate.

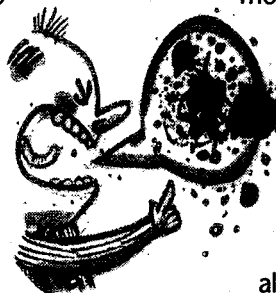
The term "partial birth" abortion first appeared in newspapers six months ago, when the bill's co-sponsor, Sen. Robert Smith, a New Hampshire Republican, demonstrated the procedure on the Senate floor using a plastic fetus and a pair of scissors. When this legislation later passed the House Judiciary Committee, many reporters referred to the procedure by its medical name—intact "D&E" (dilation and evacuation) abortion—and pointed out that the term "partial birth" had been carefully chosen by anti-choicers for its shock value.

The *Los Angeles Times*, for example, wrote in a June news story: "To press home their point, [the bill's co-sponsor, Rep. Charles] Canady and his allies called the procedure 'partial birth abortions,' although there appears to be no consensus within the ob-gyn community on what to call it." But five months later—after the legislation had gained momentum—this same *Los Angeles Times* reporter was repeatedly referring to

the procedure as a "partial birth" abortion. Any reference to the term's roots in the anti-choice movement had apparently been forgotten.

Some newspapers accepted the language of the bill's supporters even from the outset. On June 14, *USA Today* referred to the controversial procedures only as "late-term 'partial birth' abortions." Even though the newspaper received, and printed, an angry letter from a national coalition of abortion providers protesting its use of this non-medical term, *USA Today* continued to refer to the procedure solely as a "partial birth abortion."

The editorial boards of many major newspapers opposed this legislation, though even they seemed unable to escape the anti-choicers' influence.



The *Chicago Sun-Times* editorial board wrote that "Senators should not be asked to vote on legislation that is wrapped in rhetoric." Yet this same pro-choice editorial repeatedly referred to the controversial procedure by the name the anti-choice movement invented.

A handful of newspapers did succeed in writing stories about this abortion procedure without ever using the term "partial birth." This was especially true in Ohio, where a bill banning the procedure has already passed the state legislature. In writing about the national debate, the *Dayton Daily News* sometimes managed only to use the term "D&X" abortion—proving that the anti-choice movement has yet to control completely the language in this public debate.

TOMORROW'S NEWS TONIGHT

By Steve Brodner

Oliver Stone
unveils
next
project

RODHAM





IN ARMS' WAY

The timing was perfect when a group of peace activists came to Capitol Hill last month. Led by former Costa Rican President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Oscar Arias, they came to launch the Year 2000 Campaign, a global effort to reduce bloated defense budgets and increase government spending on housing, social welfare and other human needs. Just as the last of several House members had finished speaking in support of the Campaign, a bell went off calling them to vote on the 1996 Defense Authorization Bill.

"It couldn't be more ironic," said Rep. Elizabeth Furse (D-OR), who stressed that the \$264.7 billion measure, which the House eventually approved 267-149, clearly illustrates the "misplaced sense of priorities" that is fueling military spending worldwide. "The Pentagon is getting [\$7.1 billion] more than it asked for," she lamented, "while schools, children and mothers are going without."

According to Arias, the Year 2000 Campaign seeks to usher in a "new era of world affairs" in which all nations will be committed to slashing military spending without reducing security. "The time has come to make people more important than arms," Arias said

at the December 15 symposium.

The campaign calls for the United Nations to establish regional demilitarization talks throughout the world. The talks would identify and implement confidence-building measures, such as limiting the ability of nations to mount offensive cross-border attacks while maintaining defensively oriented weapons systems.

Savings from reduced military spending would fund reforms related to demilitarization, including the conversion of defense industries to production for peaceful purposes and the reintegration of demobilized soldiers into civilian society.

Although the UN would play a leading role in implementing the campaign's strategy, symposium organizers came to Washington to launch their effort because the United States is largely responsible for the \$868 billion price tag on global security, both through its own extravagant defense budget and its bustling business as the world's largest exporter of weapons. Year 2000 leaders also wanted to highlight pending legislation aimed at curbing the global arms trade.

The campaign supporters promoted a bill sponsored by Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy II (D-MA) that would require the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to tie their assistance packages to demilitarization efforts. The World Bank claimed that the institution's charter prohibits it from engaging in such a "political" undertaking, but Arias retorted that "the charter should be changed. We're not talking about the Ten Commandments."

Amid the shape-shifting political alliances of the post-Cold War world, Arias and other activists recognize that

the implementation of the Year 2000 Campaign is a Herculean task, especially for the beleaguered UN. Nonetheless, they remain certain that the UN is the place to start negotiating for arms reductions. "We always forget about the successes of the United Nations," says Arias. "I come from a region where the UN has been very successful."

—Peter Zirnite

SHAREWARE

Do you feel threatened by the multimedia phenomenon that is Bill Gates? Do you shudder at the thought of shelling out countless hundreds of dollars for the latest software upgrades churned out by Microsoft and its flailing competitors? Then you might want to try Linux instead. Though little known outside the arcane world of hackers, Linux not only matches the dazzling technical capabilities offered by the latest commercial software systems, it's available for free on the Internet.

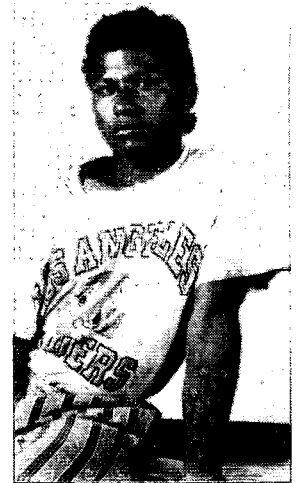
Linux is the brainchild of Linus Torvalds, a 25-year-old graduate student at the University of Helsinki, who developed the program as part of an experiment. As he wrote the code for the system, Torvalds posted his results on the Internet and received advice from other hackers around the world. What resulted in late 1991, was a remarkably bug-free, public domain version of Unix, the operating system on which the Internet is built. Initially used for network servers, Linux is increasingly popular as an operating system for PCs.

Today, Linux has an estimated 500,000 users worldwide. And because the source codes of the Linux operating system have been made freely available, programmers have developed a large body of associated software that is freely distributed on the Internet, including DOS and Windows emulators that allow users to run programs like Word Perfect.

Torvalds makes no claims that

Blood in the streets

HOT OFF THE PRESS: TORTURE OF GUATEMALAN STREET CHILDREN, AN ILLUSTRATED CHRONICLE of kids—living and dead—who have suffered at the hands of the country's police forces. The report offers evidence of systematic sadism in a security apparatus that was long-financed by the United States. But so far, few in the American media have taken note. Steven Malamud, spokesperson for Casa Alianza, the Costa Rican-based social service agency that produced the report, notes that the fate of Brazilian street children receives more attention in the United States because "more kids are killed in Brazil—three a day—than anywhere else. But in terms of percentage of the population, the situation in Guatemala is equal if not worse." One of the children featured in the report is Julio Cesar Reyes (pictured at right), who on May 14, 1993, when 15, was grabbed by two plain-clothes policemen who asked him for identification. He said he had none, and tried to wrestle free. The policemen twisted Julio Cesar's arm behind his back and burned him 19 times with cigarettes. When being treated at the hospital, two men in plain clothes came looking for him. A doctor helped him escape through a back door and Julio Cesar fled to Honduras, where he is staying at Casa Alianza. That same year, the director of Casa Alianza, Bruce Harris, also fled Guatemala, after a funeral wreath bearing his and his wife's name was delivered to their home. —JB



Linux is superior to commercial software systems, only that it offers more freedom of choice, particularly when problems arise. "The point is, you're not left to the mercy of any particular vendor," he says. "[You] can ask just about anybody if they can fix it." By contrast, he adds, Microsoft's market-domination strategies tend to limit consumer options. "You're free to use any product you want as long as you use their basic system that nobody else can support."

In many ways, the greatest threat Linux poses is to Novell, Microsoft's biggest competitor and the largest distributor of Unix. A quick survey of Linux users finds a loyalty bordering on fanaticism. According to Torvalds, the system can be found running somewhere in nearly every university computer science department in the world. A group of Linux users has set up a nonprofit group, Linux International, on the World Wide Web, and Linux enthusiasts have made the newsgroup "comp.os.linux.announce" one of the top 30 most frequented Internet sites.

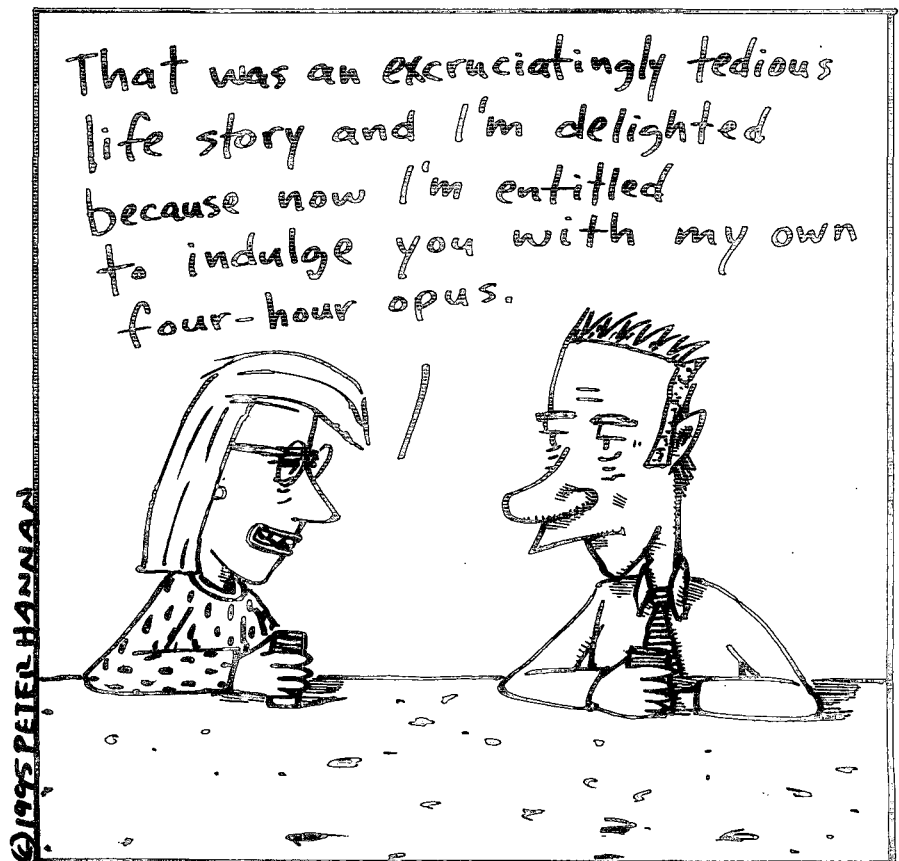
Although it hardly rivals the market dominance of the Windows system, which has 50 million users worldwide, Linux's popularity with computer users—which has grown exponentially for the past few years—must give Microsoft pause. More unsettling, presumably, is the fact that top-notch

technology is circulating outside the commercial channels the software giant has come to dominate. As software titans battle each other for market share, Linux enthusiasts are left to wonder why more computer users

haven't caught on. Is Windows better than IBM's OS/2 or Apple's Macintosh? To engage in such arguments, one Linux user says, is like "fighting over pennies that are lying on a street paved with gold." —Brian Mier

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan



THE FIRST STONE

BURMA ONLINE

By Joel Bleifuss

Burma's military junta has proclaimed 1996 "Visit Myanmar Year," hoping that an influx of tourists will add luster to the royal regime's tarnished image and at the same time bring in hard currency. But the Free Burma Coalition, a network of student groups based in Madison, Wisc., has other plans. The coalition intends to make sure everyone knows why Nobel Peace Prize Winner Aung San Suu Kyi has urged tourists and investors to stay away from the southeast Asian nation. Though Kyi was freed from house arrest last July, Burma's military still refuses to honor the country's 1990 elections, in which her party, the National League of Democracy, won 82 percent of the seats in the National Assembly.

Thanks to the coalition's efforts, the Burma campaign is on its way to becoming the anti-apartheid movement of the '90s. But this decade's students are coordinating their movement over the Internet and highlighting their demands for corporate responsibility.

At the central keyboard of this electronic nexus sits a 32-year-old Burmese dissident named Zarni. He left his country in July 1988, just weeks before the military regime, known as SLORC (the State Law and Order Restoration Council, pronounced as it's spelled), killed an estimated 5,000 student protesters in a series of massacres. "I haven't been back since," says Zarni, now a graduate student in education at the University of Wisconsin. "I am on the hit list. Even at home in Madison I get threatening phone calls that stop just short of explicit threats on my life."

"Everything has been done on the Internet so far," says Zarni, who founded the Free Burma Coalition in September. "Through the Internet, which most students have access to, I can post announcements inviting people to join us in this movement. And on the World Wide Web we have a page where we post flyers, campaign posters, and photographs. There is the economic factor as well. It costs nothing for students to use the Internet."

Since its September inception the Coalition has mushroomed. "At this point we have about 90 campuses working on the Burma front," says Zarni. Though U.S.-based, the group is also active on campuses in Japan, India, Germany, France, England, Thailand, Canada, the Netherlands and Norway.

The Internet provides Zarni easy access to far-flung Free Burma outposts. The Free Burma group in Thailand keeps everyone in the coalition up to date on current events in neighboring Burma. And the groups in England provide information on the tourism boycott that is taking off there.

"The Internet is our mainstay," says Davide Horne, who is coordinating action at the University of Indiana at Bloomington. "We can't afford to send out mass

mailings like more established groups, but we can distribute all of our information to the 2,500 names on our local list over the Internet. Only about 50 aren't on the net so we mail to them, and to pay for that we do bake sales." Horne, a 19-year-old freshman who says he's had an interest in Burma since middle school, has recently been organizing opposition at Indiana to a luxury cruise up the Irrawaddy River to Mandalay that is being sponsored by the university's alumni association. The association, and its counterparts at Yale, Illinois, Northwestern, University of Southern California, Penn State, Notre Dame, Duke, Brown and Stanford, have invited rich alums to take the "The Road to Mandalay" and explore what the promotional brochure describes as an "unspoiled country."

The historic temples that the alumni will visit have all been prettified using forced labor. Periodically, SLORC enslaves Burmese citizens—men, women (pregnant or not) and children as young as eight—to work on civic and military building projects. The only people exempt from what the government terms "self reliance" projects are military families and those wealthy enough to pay the monthly fine imposed on those who refuse to work. At times, this forced labor includes walking in front of military units to act as human mine sweepers.

Outside of the academy, Don Erickson has been organizing opposition to Burma tours sponsored by civic organizations. Erickson, the coordinator of the Burma Project at Synapses, a peace and justice group in Chicago, is a self-acknowledged straggler on the information superhighway. A colleague at Synapses has helped keep Erickson plugged into the Burma coalition's online efforts by sending and retrieving Internet messages for him. Thanks to Erickson's organizing, the Art Institute of Chicago withdrew its sponsorship of a Burma tour. But the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, along with councils in at least 30 other cities, are pushing ahead to Mandalay. Erickson publicly chided

the Chicago council: "The tour, which includes a three day boat trip down the Irrawady River, is the equivalent of sponsoring a boat trip down the Rhine in the summer of 1939."

Like the critics of American companies who did business with Germany's Nazi regime, the Burma coalition is targeting multinationals who continue to work with SLORC. Stanford University students have led the way in devising campaigns against the few corporations still doing business in Burma—most notably Pepsi and three oil companies, UNOCAL, ARCO and Texaco. Stanford students are demanding that their school use the university's voting shares in Burma-invested corporations to support stockholder resolutions. In a report distributed over the Internet last month, the Stanford students explained their strategy and provided the text of a resolution that will be voted on by ARCO shareholders. That resolution would require ARCO's board to "develop guidelines on maintaining investments in or withdrawing from countries where ... there is a call by human rights advocates, pro-democracy organizations or legitimately elected representatives for economic sanctions against their country."

For David Wolfburg in Los Angeles, the Stanford report was just one of the many indispensable Burma documents he has pulled off the Internet. "The Internet serves a great purpose for organizing," says Wolfburg, a 27-year-old environmentalist who works with the L.A. Campaign for a Free Burma. "SLORC has shut out the media in Burma, but we are able to get the information because we have human-rights people in and out of the Burma-Thai border area. Refugees fleeing SLORC are interviewed in Thailand by students with lap top computers."

The Free Burma Coalition has also posted photographs on the World Wide Web of tribal villagers holding up signs that proclaim, "UNOCAL your dollars are buying SLORC guns." Wolfburg's group downloaded those photos and brought them to a nearby Kinkos, where they were blown up and used in demonstrations against UNOCAL, the Los Angeles-based oil company that, in partnership with SLORC, is building a natural gas pipeline from the Indian Ocean to the Thai border. Tens of thousands of Burmese people have worked as forced laborers making UNOCAL's pipeline a reality.

In response, the Free Burma Coalition is organizing a national boycott of UNOCAL's Union 76 gas stations. Much of the boycott organizing has been done over the Internet—but not all. Wolfburg, with a chuckle, offers a

few words of caution: "Groups need to be aware that that their communication on the net is being read by the SLORC and everyone else. We put together a package to help groups boycott UNOCAL, and we announced it on the Internet. Among the dozens of requests we got back was one from David Garcia at UNOCAL public relations."

Wolfburg is upbeat. "Thanks to the Web sites and to Zarni in Wisconsin, we pulled ourselves together on the Internet into focus groups," he says. "There are now Burma focus groups on tourism, oil and gas, on media and public speakers, and on international outreach. And a lot more student groups are coming on board. It is exploding."

Indeed. On January 15, Amnesty International USA will kick off a Burma campaign aimed at and directed by the group's 1,300 chapters at colleges, high schools and elementary schools. Meghan Faux, of Amnesty's national youth program in Washington, D.C., says that the campaign will call for the release of the 20 members of the Burmese parliament-elect who have been imprisoned by SLORC since the aborted 1990 elections. But rather than appeal directly to SLORC, the Amnesty campaign, in a change from its usual government-directed efforts, will publicly pressure the corporations doing business with the military regime to use their influence to gain the release of Burma's prisoners

of conscience. In its campaign, Amnesty will be working closely with the Free Burma Coalition, except in the area of boycotts, which as a matter of policy Amnesty does not advocate.

And Amnesty isn't the only campus-based political network that has turned its attention to Burma. In October, Zarni garnered support at the national conference of the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC), a Chapel Hill, N.C.-based organization with more than 180 campus affiliates. Linda Kwan, SEAC's national council coordinator, is helping organizing the group's Burma efforts. Kwan, a 21-year-old senior in graphic design at University of Illinois-Champaign, argues that the Burma struggle has the "potential to reach the breadth of the anti-apartheid movement."

"We are reaching the stage where people are beginning to realize that corporate accountability is an important issue," says Kwan. "We need to do what we can to send a message to these multinational corporations that their business-as-usual is not going to be acceptable, and that they need to start taking some kind of social responsibility. That is quite a goal, but we have the potential here to change corporate behavior in Burma and the rest of the world."



R U S S I A

Democracy and its discontents

As the Russian Federation's economy founders, its citizens are questioning the wisdom of market reforms.

By Fred Weir
MOSCOW

In one of history's oddest turns, post-Soviet Russia has begun to resemble a communist-era propaganda poster. It may be Boris Yeltsin's greatest accomplishment—wily old ex-Politburo member that he is—to have done what his predecessors never could; he made the Russian people believe in a faded image where the Communist Party is a popular grass-roots movement that staunchly defends democracy and peoples' rights. Capitalists are criminal bloodsuckers, ready to sell out their country, or their grandmothers, for a profit. And the politicians who proudly label themselves "democrats" are in fact front men for the iron-fisted rule of the rich.

In mid-December, two days after Russian voters acted on this perception and handed the Communists a resounding victory in parliamentary elections, a very frustrated Grigory Yavlinsky

was pouring his heart out over coffee at Moscow's International Press Club. "Why should anybody be surprised that Russians have turned against the democrats?" he asked. "Look at what has been done by Yeltsin in our name." Yavlinsky, a wavy-haired, 43-year-old economist, is the leader of Yabloko, the only liberal party that made it into parliament amid the Communist sweep. He is also the market reformers' best hope to win the presidential elections slated for next June. "Two features have come to signify a democrat in Russia," he said. "First, a democrat is a person who presses for an unlimited concentration of power in the hands of President Yeltsin. Second, a democrat is a person who selflessly struggles against the budget deficit. Real democrats, who want to build free institutions and a socially oriented economy, have been shunted aside."

Yavlinsky worries that if Russia's leaders do not change economic course

and begin to address the anger felt by millions of poverty-stricken and underemployed people, the Communists could ride the popular wave of revulsion and bitterness into the Kremlin come June.

The man who has evoked this alarm is Gennady Zyuganov, the 51-year-old former apparatchik who heads the victorious Communist Party of the Russian Federation. His party dominated the polls by skillfully mobilizing the nostalgia vote, but also by projecting at least an image of workable social democracy. Appearing at the press club the same day as Yavlinsky (the two men carefully avoided seeing each other), Zyuganov declared the Yeltsin paradigm of economic reform dead and put forward the Communists' plan for scaling the heights of power. "We will seek cooperation with a wide range of political forces and build a left-wing, patriotic coalition capable of taking the presidency," he said.

Although their ideological starting point and social constituency are radically different from Yabloko's, the Communists tapped the same vein of resentment among Russians and, judging by the vote, did it much better. "There were 43 parties running in the parliamentary election. All but one of them ran in opposition to President Yeltsin and the status quo," says Viktor Levashov, an analyst with the Institute of Social and Political Studies. "So, if we see the electorate leaning heavily to one party, it behooves us to seek the positive reasons for that."

Indeed, many observers believe Yavlinsky's view of the Communists as a mere lightning rod for popular discontent fails to appreciate the careful mix of pragmatism and old-fashioned anti-capitalist rhetoric that shapes their appeal. "The Communist Party is a strange and perhaps unstable

hybrid," says Alexander Buzgalin, a Moscow University political scientist and democratic social activist. "The leadership is composed of bureaucrats with statist ambitions, who would like to restore a paternalistic and authoritarian system. But it has a mass membership that is far more radical. Grass-roots Communists are propelled by ideas of social justice, economic security and national dignity. Much of the party's program is social democratic proposals aimed at its members and sympathizers."

Primary among the Communists' specific proposals is a mixed economy, with public ownership of land, natural resources, strategic industry and liquor production. The party platform supports "reasonable protection" and state subsidies for selected private businesses in fields such as agriculture, consumer goods production and forest products.

During the campaign, Zyuganov pledged that the Communists would review the mass privatizations of the last two years and revoke those found to have been illegally conducted through patronage or corruption. "We have to neutralize the damaging effects of shock therapy, halt the collapse of production and stabilize living standards," he said during his appearance at the press club. "The tools we will use are familiar to every government in the world. These include setting a balance of private and public interests that corresponds to our national needs and level of development."

Zyuganov also says he will press parliament to annul the 1991 Belovezhskaya Puscha accords that dissolved the USSR. He is vague on any further steps toward reunion, except to say that any reintegration of former Soviet republics must be "voluntary."

But the Communists are unequivocal in their call for sweeping constitutional reform, as are Yabloko and most other opposition parties. The aim is to reverse what Zyuganov calls Yeltsin's "state coup"—the two week show-down in the fall of 1993 when Yeltsin abolished Russia's constitution and forcibly disbanded parliament. Yeltsin then authored a new charter awarding the lion's share of authority to the president. "Less than a third of the Russians voted for the Yeltsin constitution," Zyuganov remarked—a reference to the low voter turnout in the referendum that adopt-

ed the charter. "Yet it gives the president the powers of a czar. He can simply sign his name to a scrap of paper and launch a war—as he did in Chechnya. What normal person can accept this?"

In place of the Yeltsin constitution, the Communist version would scrap the post of president and restore "soviet power"—which under the new model no longer means a Leninist system, but rather a parliamentary one similar to the British model. Yabloko and other Yeltsin opponents also advocate constitutional reform, but call for a more moderate reduction of presidential power and the creation of parliamentary checks—a system that would remodel Russian government along the lines of the United States.



Though the December 17 election did not reveal which presidential system Russian voters prefer, it did delineate their overwhelming disgust for the current president. Of course, Yeltsin himself was not up for election. Rather, Russians faced a bewildering array of choices when they went to the polls. Once there, they were handed two ballots. One listed the 43 parties in the running for the 450 seats of the Duma, Parliament's lower house, the other a slate of local candidates. Half of the Duma's seats are awarded by proportional representation according to the vote by

party list. The other half go in first-past-the-post district contests.

By the time votes were tallied, the Communists had polled more than 20 percent of the party vote and won an even larger ratio of the territorial constituencies, making it by far the largest single force in the incoming Duma. Counting allies elected in the local races, including 20 Agrarians and nine members of former Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov's Power to the People bloc, the Communists could control a near-majority in the Duma.

Finishing second with about 11 percent of the vote was the grossly misnamed Liberal Democratic Party of crypto-fascist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Despite their second ranking, the Liberal Democrats lost roughly half their 1993 vote and succeeded in capturing only one district seat. The Zhirinovskiy contingent is likely to be the smallest in the Parlia-

ment. Still, even this meager success caught some analysts off guard. "Zhirinovskiy's continuing strength is something of a surprise," says Levashov. "Pollsters never seem to predict him right. He was thought to have blown his credibility with crazy antics and inflated rhetoric. Instead, we see he has a solid, thankfully small, base of support."

Just behind Zhirinovskiy came the Yeltsin-backed Our Home is Russia party, led by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. Despite outspending all other parties in the campaign combined, and netting a highly dubious two-thirds of the 1.7 million military votes, the Our Home is Russia won under 10 percent of the total and picked up just 10 district seats. Finally, Yavlinsky's party earned about 7 percent of the vote and 14 constituency seats.

More than three dozen parties failed to clear the 5 percent hurdle necessary to gain entry to parliament. Their share of the mandates will be divvied up among the winners. Yet even the losers' tales offered insight into the mood of the voting public. Former Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, the architect of Russia's economic shock therapy, suffered the ultimate humiliation as his party was edged out by its arch enemy, the ultra-left Communists For the USSR bloc. Gen. Alexander Lebed, Russia's Pinochet wannabe who promised to "build democracy by authoritarian methods," won his local constituency but saw his party—and his presidential hopes—go down in flames as voters nationwide rejected that particular option.

The biggest loser, of course, was President Yeltsin, who had appealed to Russians in an impassioned TV address to shun the Communists and back his chosen horse, Our Home is Russia.

"The main crisis is the plunging living standards, continued drop in production and the collapse of social welfare," says Buzgalin. "The election result only reflected that. The Yeltsin regime has lost its support base as its economic reforms have drained away into the sands of crime and corruption over the past few years."

Indeed, since the euphoria unleashed by the demise of the USSR and the introduction of Gaidar's shock-therapy market reforms in January 1992, Russia has traveled a rough road. The State Statistics Committee reports that nearly a third of the population

today lives below the subsistence line. Real wages plummeted 12 percent in 1995. Millions of workers, tied to sinking industries, go without salaries for months at a time. In response to Ronald Reagan's famous query to the American public, "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" more than 80 percent of Russians would have to say, "No."

"Economic decline is not a new phenomenon, but people's patience is wearing thin," says Buzgalin. "I am not sure the Yeltsin regime understands this."

In his first response to the election, President Yeltsin reminded Russians that, within the system of power as defined by the 1993 Constitution, parliament has little more than a decorative function. "We will continue with the policies we have been carrying out," he said in televised remarks after the election. Although only one in 10 Russians voted for his appointed prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, Yeltsin made clear that no key personnel changes are in the offing.

The real significance of the parliamentary elections, of course, is as a bellwether for the upcoming presidential race. "Everyone is looking to the presidential election, that's the one that matters," says Viktor Kremeniuk, an analyst at Moscow's Institute of Canada-USA Studies. "Results of the parliamentary polls make it clear who the

Stacking the deck

Foreign election observers have routinely certified post-Soviet Russian polls as "free and fair" despite documented evidence that a 1993 constitutional referendum was manipulated to ensure an outcome favoring President Boris Yeltsin. Now indications are mounting that many armed services personnel were fraudulently induced to back the government party in the latest parliamentary election.

About 105 million Russians were eligible to vote last December 17 for the new state Duma, the 450-seat lower house of Parliament. Of the 65 percent that turned out, 22 percent voted for the Communists, 11 percent for ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, and just under 10 percent for the pro-Yeltsin party, Our Home is Russia (NDR), led by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

But on closed military bases, where there were no foreign observers, the vote for Chernomyrdin's party averaged about 66 percent. There have been recurring allegations that the troops were coerced into voting for NDR—no small matter, since the armed services vote totals 1.7 million in Russia. "The uniformed military voter turnout was 100 percent, but these voters are also reported to have mostly voted for the government party," writes Pavel Felgenhauer, military analyst for the daily paper *Segodnya*. "Not long before the elections, the defense minister, Gen. Pavel Grachev, called on the military to vote for Our Home, and it seems his orders were followed."

The only one of some 43 parties supporting Yeltsin and the status quo in the Duma contest, NDR is dubbed "the party of power" because of the preponderance of senior bureaucrats, managers of state-owned industries and regional administrators in its ranks. If reports by the independent paper *Moskovsky Komsomlets* are accurate, coerced votes from the armed forces could account for as many as a quarter of the votes NDR received nationwide. "This appears to have happened either because officers engaged in electioneering activities at a

most important challengers are and give them a launching pad for the next stage of the struggle."

For his part, Yeltsin has suggested his own re-election strategy will be to reprise his celebrated, if fraying, role as dragonslayer. "The path of Marxist ideology is disastrous for Russia and Russians," he said. "We shall not allow that."

Bluster notwithstanding, a poll released by the independent VTSIOM opinion research center after the election showed the president's popularity in the low single digits, far behind Zhirinovskiy, Zyuganov, Yavlinsky and even Chernomyrdin. With so much power at stake, speculation is rife that presidential elections will be canceled if it seems Yeltsin cannot win. "The period between the parliamentary elections in December and the scheduled presidential vote in June is going to be a very rocky, dangerous time," says Boris Kagarlitsky, a left-wing political philosopher. According to Kagarlitsky, the fundamental problem at the heart of Russian democracy is that a tiny elite has completely transformed Russia, largely without the consent of the rest of the population. "Especially after Yeltsin smashed the elected bodies of Parliament and local councils, the processes of privatization and capital accumulation have been carried on outside the law," Kagarlitsky says. "Vast fortunes have been made, and immense properties have changed hands on the strength of presidential

decrees—not by national law or custom."

As a consequence, Russia's governing elite and many of the new business circles are totally dependent on Yeltsin for their positions and their wealth. A new leader, says Kagarlitsky, particularly a Communist or a nationalist, could declare them all criminals and expropriate their property or worse. "The elite cannot allow supreme power to change hands in unpredictable—that is to say, democratic—ways," he says. "A cancellation of the elections seems the most likely outcome."

Others offer a less apocalyptic scenario. Russia's new elite and leaders of the increasingly powerful Communists could strike a compromise, one that accepts the emerging division of power and property but simultaneously seeks to strengthen the state's role and improve social welfare. "Should the left come to power, they will most likely be able to complicate market reforms," writes Lyudmilla Telen, deputy editor of the weekly *Moskovskiy Novosti*. "The corporate regime, made up of various elites that have been formed in Russia, is strong enough to defend its interests against any left revenge—if what is meant by revenge is not simple victory at the elections but fully carrying out certain political and economic ideas."

For the Yeltsin administration, the moment of decision—whether or not to go ahead with the elections—is rapidly approaching. "You can play with numbers, or pretend nothing important has happened, but there is no doubt the Russian electorate has shifted sharply to the left," says Buzgalin. "The right-wing nationalists and neo-liberals have suffered dramatic losses. If the regime insists on continuing with its anti-human economic policies for the next few months, and if the left can organize itself behind a reasonable candidate and policies, and, if indeed the presidential elections do take place as scheduled, then the left has a real chance for victory."

Perhaps then, despite their disillusionment with this side of the post-Soviet looking glass, Russians will launch a new attempt to achieve the glowing vision of democracy, social justice and economic prosperity that Boris Yeltsin painted for them when he first came to power.

Fred Weir writes regularly from Russia for *In These Times*.

time of voting or, if some shocking reports are to be believed, simply went to the polling stations and reported numbers of votes without an intervening balloting stage," says Robert McIntyre, a nongovernmental U.S. observer and fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C.

The Russian defense ministry has denied allegations of fraud, although an anonymous officer told the Associated Press there could have been "separate cases" of military voter compulsion. He nonetheless insisted that "there definitely was no order, command, directive or some document from above" forcing soldiers to vote NDR.

In 1993 elections, military voting patterns roughly paralleled those of the civilian population. The differences that did exist showed soldiers leaning towards anti-Yeltsin parties led by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy or the Communists. But little has changed to give ill-fed, underpaid conscripts a brighter view of their government. "If the figures on army voting this year are correct, then it's the biggest surprise I've ever seen," says Viktor Kuvaldin, a political scientist with the Gorbachev Foundation in Moscow. "Such voting in the garrisons raises obvious doubts. It has to be checked."

But checking may prove easier said than done. In the autumn of 1993, Yeltsin abolished the Soviet-era constitution and forcibly dissolved the legislature. Although the public allegedly approved the new constitution in a referendum, allegations of fraud in that election proved so widespread that Yeltsin appointed a commission to investigate. After commissioners turned up evidence of massive fraud, their office was sealed and they were dismissed.

Observers fear that renewed doubts about the legitimacy of the voting process could have lasting effects on the health of the fledgling democratic process. "There is widespread belief that the 1993 election was not honestly counted," says McIntyre. "If the same perception is allowed to develop with respect to the 1995 election, it will cast a cloud over the conduct and validity of the presidential vote scheduled for next June."

—FW

R U S S I A

Prophets of Duma

The Western press pandered to misplaced fears as restive Russians returned Reds to parliament.

By Vladimir
Klimenko

The impressive gains by Communists in last month's parliamentary elections provoked dire predictions about the demise of reform in Russia. But the Communist Party's performance should not be viewed as a dress rehearsal for next June's scheduled presidential elections. Russia's political future is likely to prove far more stable than edgy Western commentators assume.

"There's nothing tragic about the results," says Mikhail Shevelyov, an editor at the liberal weekly *Moscow News*. "At first glance it seems terrible. In fact, though, there was no radical shift because the balance of forces has been maintained." The hard-line opponents of free-market reform—an informal bloc that includes both the Communists and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's ultra-nationalist Liberal Democrats—failed to improve substantially over their showing in the 1993 parliamentary elections. Then, the ultra-nationalist Liberal Democrats garnered 23 percent of the vote while the Commu-

nists trailed behind with 12 percent. In the December 17 vote the ratios were reversed, with the Communist Party capturing 25 percent and the Liberal Democrats polling 11 percent.

According to Shevelyov, "The most interesting thing is the complete defeat of the military factor in politics: Generals Lebed, Rutskoi, and others who placed great-power prestige at the top of their platform."

And just as the elections marked a realignment of forces within the hardline bloc, a similar redistribution of support occurred among various pro-reform parties, which retained roughly the same overall percentage of legislators in the Duma. Grigory Yavlinsky's Yabloko party won 7 percent of the vote, the same as in 1993.

Russia's Choice, the party of reform architect Yegor Gaidar, dropped its share from 15 percent to under 5 percent. Gaidar's earlier supporters instead chose to back the establishment reformers led by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, whose Our Home is Russia Party captured 10 percent of the vote.

What did change was the relative weight of party strength within the legislature. The Communists, who won approximately a quarter of the vote, actually control 35 percent of all available seats in the Duma. According to Russian electoral law, half of the 450-member parliament is elected by party slate (as in Europe); another half through individual, district-based races (as in the United States). Parties that fail to gain 5 percent of the vote are eliminated from the party slate list, thereby giving those that do clear 5 percent a greater relative share of the total.

In spite of the Communists' gains, Russian reforms are not likely to be suddenly reversed for a second major reason: June's presidential election will be much more decisive. Since the Yeltsin-era constitution gives the executive far more power than the Duma, the struggle over the presidency will be a qualitatively different battle fought with a different arsenal. The parliamentary election was about parties. The presidential election will be about leaders. And with party loyalties still so fragmented, success will depend largely on a presidential candidate's charisma and the size of his war chest.

The recent elections were ideally suited to the Communists' strengths. With a base of support among low-income citizens, the Communists generally avoided expensive television ads. Instead, they relied on a substantial core of dedicated foot soldiers willing to spread their message. But what served the Communists well in this election will be their Achilles' heel in the presidential race. They have a substantial but inelastic base of core supporters, most of whom are pensioners. And their numbers are insufficient to give them the outright majority needed to elect a president, even in the unlikely case that they forge an alliance with Zhirinovskiy. (At the moment, the rules for the presidential election have

not yet been finalized. But most likely, if no candidate gains a majority in the first round, there will be a runoff between the two candidates with the most votes.)

While commanding a solid group of loyalists, Gennady Zyuganov, the Communist leader, lacks the charisma necessary to broaden his base. If the successful presidential campaign of the youthful Polish Communist Aleksander Kwasniewski is any indication, Russia's Communists will need a leader who can appeal more easily across generational boundaries. "If the Communist Party had a candidate other than Zyuganov, they could do well," says Andrei Fadin, a Moscow political analyst. "They have a reliable, disciplined electorate, but they need to do better to win. Even 25 or 30 percent won't be enough. Zyuganov just can't attract a broader range of voters."

Of course, given the poor showing by Our Home is Russia, Prime Minister Chernomyrdin can hardly be looking forward to June's presidential race. Nevertheless, the prime minister has indirect control over the media, the support of rich and powerful backers, and command of a vast, if corrupt, patronage network. In addition, Chernomyrdin has reputedly amassed a substantial personal fortune while in office. He will undoubtedly have the means to launch a glitzy modern campaign—provided his boss Boris Yeltsin decides not to run himself. And if the election devolves into a personality contest, the more charming Chernomyrdin should edge out the Communist Zyuganov.

A TV-driven campaign might also help rejuvenate Zhirinovskiy's political fortunes. Russia's notorious nationalist lost half of his voters in the last round but still managed to do twice as well as experts had predicted. Zhirinovskiy appears unfazed by a number of embarrassing public scandals, including charges that he sold slots on his party list to wanted criminals in order to pay for TV ads. Yavlinsky, of the Yabloko party, might also benefit from a personality contest. Articulate and bright, the young economist combines pro-market policies with a concern for the social welfare. His strategy is calculated to attract both the growing middle class as well as socialist-inclined voters uncomfortable with the Communists' failure to unambiguously disavow their Stalinist legacy.

Nevertheless, the linchpin in all political forecasts remains Boris Yeltsin. Russia's president has said that he will postpone a decision on running for re-election until February. Should bad health force him to retire, the incumbent's mantle passes automatically to Chernomyrdin. If Yeltsin decides to run, he will face the daunting task of living down his responsibility for painful economic reforms, the war in Chechnya, pervasive government corruption, and a collapse of law and order. Of course, the possibility remains that Yeltsin will simply call off the elections. In a country with such weak democratic traditions, people speak almost off-handedly about such a possibility.

"Right now it seems unlikely that the election would be canceled," says Fadin. "Boris Yeltsin doesn't want to go down in history as the man who buried democracy. But if

something like a Zhirinovskiy victory begins to look inevitable, then Yeltsin could, with Western blessings, pull off an Algerian-style scenario." If Yeltsin runs, his re-election will hinge on his ability to convince people that, for better or worse, the changes initiated by him will lead to a revitalized Russia. Several days before the December election a Russian general explained why he was voting for the present regime: "Sure, they all became millionaires by embezzling state property. But at least these officials have already eaten their fill. And that means stability, because today's elite wants to protect what it has already stolen."

Some observers wonder if the grinding poverty experienced by many Russians will lead to an explosion of popular discontent—either at the polls, or in the streets. But analysts like Fadin are betting that political fatalism will win out: "Russia has lived through all the adventures and changes it can handle. Many people realize that the reforms were, of course, unfair, but what was begun needs to be finished." Exhausted by the turbulence of change, the Russian people may opt for the more predictable choice in June by re-electing their current rulers, whatever their moral and political failings.

"It's simply impossible to tell what will happen in six months," Shevelyov admits. "If presidential elections are held at all—regardless of who wins—that in itself will be a victory for democracy."

Vladimir Klimenko was the *In These Times* Moscow correspondent from 1991-1993.



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BLACK AMERICA

A man for the season

As the new leader of the NAACP, Kweisi Mfume promises to rejuvenate the black liberation movement.

By Salim Muwakkil

If Kweisi Mfume didn't exist the NAACP would have had to invent him. The 47-year-old representative from Maryland's 7th Congressional District is such a perfect fit as the new president and chief executive officer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, it's as if fate itself had made the choice. An NAACP search committee actually performed that duty, but A. Leon Higginbotham Jr., a retired federal judge and co-chairman of that search committee, talks as if the group merely acted as fate's regent.

"We have done what geneticists have never been able to do," Higginbotham joked during the exuberant news conference announcing Mfume's selection. Higginbotham hailed the four-term congressman

and former street hood as a composite of black history's pantheon of heroes—a combination of W.E.B. DuBois' brilliance, Martin Luther King's eloquence, Thurgood Marshall's toughness and the caring of Harriet Tubman.

The judge's hyperbole reflects the relief felt among the NAACP's factious 64-member board that, in selecting Mfume, they have finally forged a consensus. After a 16-month search for a successor to Benjamin Chavis, the board had seemed hopelessly divided. Just a day before they chose Mfume, according to reports, some members had threatened to reject any candidate other than acting Executive Director Earl Shinhoster. Mfume's nomination broke the deadlock. "I don't think anyone else could have brought us together to this point," said Chairwoman Myrlie Evers-Williams, joining Mfume's hallelujah chorus. "It does seem that something spiritual happened."

Praise for the board's selection also echoes through the halls of black leadership. In the estimation of Rep. John Lewis (D-GA), Mfume matches "the skills and vision of predecessors James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, Roy Wilkins and Benjamin Hooks." The Rev. Jesse Jackson, a former candidate for Mfume's job who now heads both the National Rainbow Coalition (NRC) and Operation PUSH, also had nice things to say about the NAACP's new leader, albeit in terms considerably less reverential.

Kweisi Mfume (pronounced Kwah-EE-see Oom-FOO-may) is one of the rare stars to emerge from the political quicksand of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). Traditionally, Congress has been the career terminus for many African-American politicians. Those who haven't sought lifer status in that institution have tended to fade into political oblivion. Only two CBC members have risen to post-congressional prominence: former Pennsylvania Rep. William Gray, who now expertly leads the United Negro College Fund, and Harold Washington, the late representative from Illinois' First District, who went on to fame as Chicago's first black mayor.

Mfume's star was burnished in Congress but the story of how he arrived has emblematic resonance. Born Frizzell Gray in Baltimore, he and grew-up in some of the city's roughest neighborhoods. During his early teens, his abusive stepfather abandoned the family and left them in desperate poverty. Mfume's mother died when he was 16. Traumatized and disillusioned, he quit school and starting running with a street gang involved in petty crimes. He also fathered five children by four different women.

"Many years ago," Mfume recounted during a recent

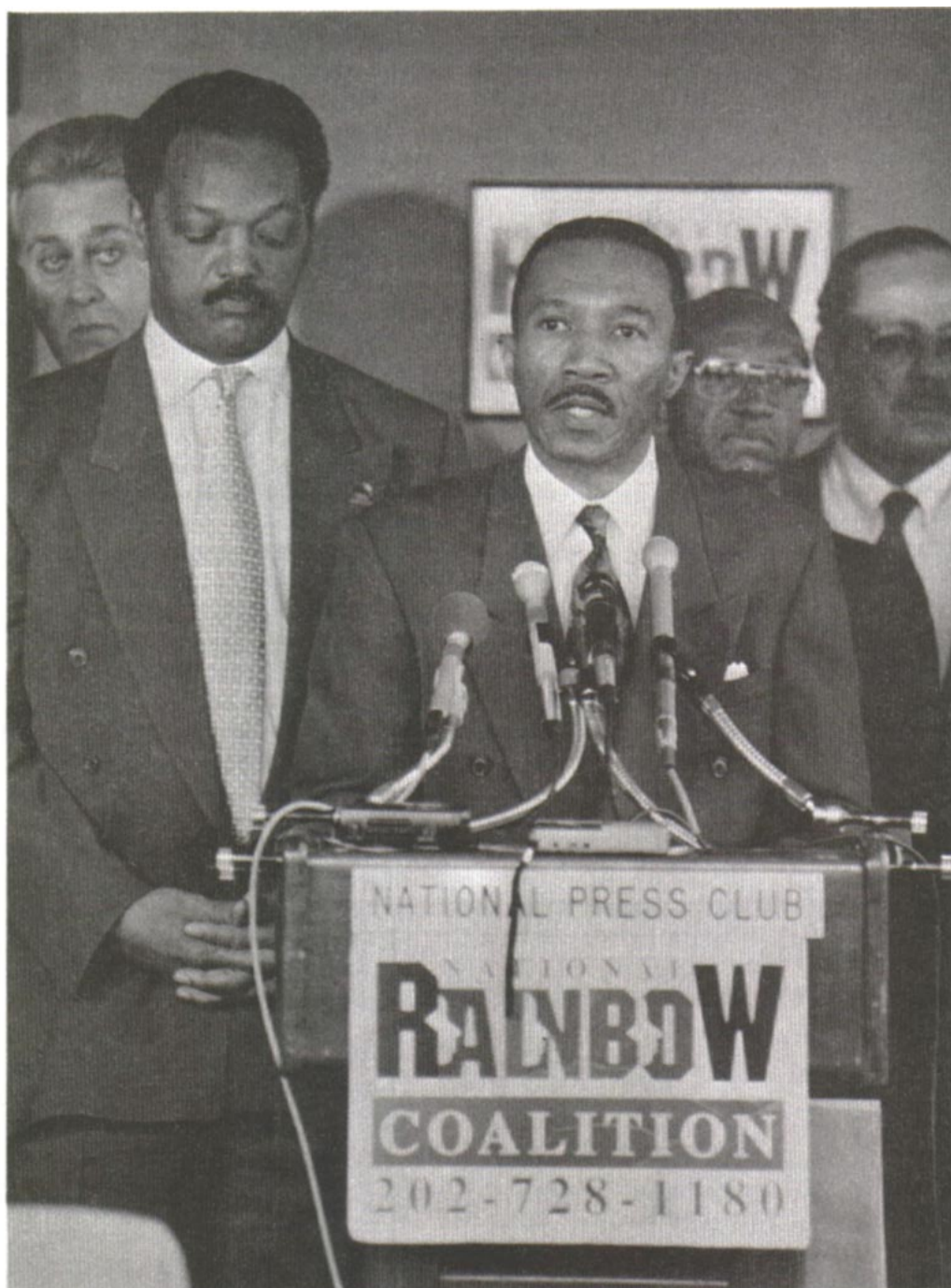
news conference, “when I was on my way to hell in a handbasket as a high school dropout, as a teen-aged parent, as someone who had given up on his society and had gotten away from his church and spiritual values that were a part of me as a child, I had become hardened and in many respects even heartless.”

Mfume can't say exactly what prompted him to change is life, but he describes it as an epiphany and links it to a recognition of his African cultural heritage. To symbolize his transformation he adopted the Swahili name for “conquering son of kings.” In the mid-1970s Mfume hosted a popular Baltimore radio talk show called “Ebony Reflections” and gained wide recognition as an astute and militant partisan for the rights of the black community. In 1979 he won a seat on the Baltimore City Council, where his acrimonious confrontations with Mayor William Donald Shaefer and the city's white political establishment became legendary. Along the way he graduated with honors from Morgan State University and earned a masters degree in liberal arts from Johns Hopkins University.

In 1986 Mfume challenged a powerful black political dynasty to win the congressional seat. Rep. Parren Mitchell (D-MD) was leaving Congress and had designated nephew Clarence Mitchell III as his heir apparent. Mfume won that Democratic primary, and since that time his share of the vote totals has never dropped below 80 percent.

Given his popularity, Mfume's departure from Congress leaves many of his constituents saddened. The Rev. Frank Reid of the influential Bethel African

**New NAACP head
Kweisi Mfume
with Jesse Jackson.**



Methodist Episcopal Church in Mfume's Baltimore district expresses mixed feelings about the move. “I think there is an up side and a down side. For Congressman Mfume to leave Congress, the state of Maryland as a whole would be losing a tremendous leader. He is someone that has consistently and without fail stood up and fought for the interests of the people of our state. But I can't help but believe that he could be a saving force to the beleaguered NAACP.”

Mfume's congressional tenure may have been golden to his local constituents but his national stature was largely undistinguished. That began to change in 1992,

when he was elected CBC chair by a 27-9 vote over former Rep. Craig Washington (D-TX) in the caucus' first contested election. Mfume's willingness to compromise had provoked Washington's challenge. But his ascension to CBC leadership has apparently invigorated his militant impulses, and although Washington later lost his seat, Mfume seems to have incorporated the Texas congressman's concerns into his leadership style.

His term coincided with the election of the the first Democrat president in 12 years and largest group of black Congress members in U.S. history. Adroitly exploiting the CBC's new power, Mfume turned the group into a formidable voting bloc and, with varying degrees of success, used its leverage to influence policy at the White House and on Capitol Hill. What's more, he ably pursued a larger strategy of building coalitions, as when he aligned the CBC much more closely with Hispanic members fighting anti-immigration legislation. "We understand the damage, more than others, of just what bigotry can do," he said at the time.

He also moved to build coalitions within the African-American community. During the 1993 annual CBC legislative conference—an event widely disparaged for its glittering excesses—he invited the participation of many non-traditional black leaders, including leaders of various street gangs. At this meeting he also announced a "sacred covenant" with, among other groups, Minister Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam.

His alliance with Farrakhan provoked intense criticism—from various civil rights groups and from within the CBC itself—and he was forced to backpedal. But in a letter responding to his critics, Mfume refused to abandon his tactical approach. He wrote that the CBC would "continue to seek a dialogue and to work where possible with those who we feel are committed ... to real and meaningful social change for our people, including the Nation of Islam."

In a sense, the NAACP job comes just at the right time for the ambitious Mfume. The optimism with which the CBC emerged from the 1992 elections has faded, and with Congress firmly controlled by conservative Republicans, the caucus has sunk into virtual irrelevance. And Mfume may be content to leave behind him some of the controversy he engendered at the CBC. "[He] never regained his political footing after the covenant with Farrakhan, and the divided caucus suffered," says David Bositis, a senior policy analyst at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a Washington think tank that focuses on issues related to African-Americans.

The Farrakhan question will follow Mfume to the NAACP. It was Mfume's "sacred covenant," after all, that initially soured some board members on his nomination. They remembered that the Rev. Benjamin Chavis, the former executive director who was fired for financial improprieties in August 1994, initially met internal resistance

because of his associations with Farrakhan. But it was the success of the Farrakhan-organized Million Man March and the NAACP's embarrassment for not participating more significantly in black America's largest-ever demonstration that eased the way for Mfume's selection.

The nomination of a redeemed stick-up kid to head this venerable American institution offers the NAACP another shot at relevance. For all his failings as executive director, Chavis attracted many young people to the fold and began to transform the group's stodgy image. Mfume undoubtedly will continue on that path. But since his political talents are more finely honed, he will more likely do so without unnecessarily ruffling any feathers.

At a time when the NAACP and the entire black freedom movement is struggling to devise new remedies for a new, more troublesome predicament, there is both a deep hunger for visionaries and a real fear of chaos. Mfume's tempered, sophisticated idealism seems perfectly to fit the times

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O

n October 15, Tipper Gore, wife of Vice President Al Gore, set out on what should have been an ordinary visit to a U.S.-funded health clinic serving the poorest section of the capital of the poorest country in the hemisphere. But the day quickly degenerated from feel-good photo-op to fiasco. Residents of Cité Soleil, a sprawling slum on the edge of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, broke up the event with a barrage of stones.

Although the U.S. press initially reported the incident as an anti-American protest, the rocks were aimed not at Mrs. Gore's entourage, but at Dr. Réginald Boulos, the Haitian director of the clinic and an influential power broker long associated with the country's right-wing paramilitaries. As Jean-Louis Eddy, a Cité Soleil resident, explained to Reuters news

service in a story the next week, "[W]e have no anti-American sentiment. On the contrary, they have done a lot of good things for us."

By good things, Mr. Eddy may have been referring to the restoration of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide by U.S. military forces last year. American diplomatic and military intervention in Haiti has wrought a positive—if limited—political change: Paramilitary terror has dropped off dramatically in the last year, and people are now able to vote without being shot at.

Nevertheless, the control Haiti's democratically elected officials exert over Haitian society remains severely circumscribed by economic policy imposed by the U.S. government. While the parliamentary elections held last summer and the recent election of Aristide ally René Préval to the presidency have given Aristide's Lavalas movement a solid majority in the country's government, the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince, and the mission of the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) in particular, arguably

remain the most powerful institutions in Haitian political life.

Given the parasitic nature of the state under Haiti's past dictators, control over economic aid has allowed AID to dominate huge swaths of the Haitian economy. Boulos' group of clinics, the Centers for Development and Health (CDS, by its French initials), is AID's richest beneficiary in Haiti, and Boulos the most visible symbol of its influence. In their demonstration last October, Cité Soleil residents were attempting to highlight the way Boulos has used CDS as a tool of political influence. Not only does CDS generate more than \$5 million a year in international revenue—it also, not coincidentally, provides a large market for Phar-Val, a pharmaceutical distributor and one of several businesses Boulos controls with his brother.

More nefarious still are Boulos' political ties. He has been linked, notably in articles by *Village Voice* columnist James Ridgeway and *The Nation's* Allan Nairn, to FRAPH, the paramilitary death squad ushered into power by U.S. intelligence during the coup led by Lieut. Gen. Raoul Cédras. It is an association that, in at least one case, has dovetailed nicely with Boulos' cozy relationship with AID. After a December, 1993 FRAPH rampage in Cité Soleil—in which dozens of homes were torched and at least 37 people died—U.S. Embassy officials took a photo-op tour of the site to announce that CDS would have complete control over \$100,000 to rebuild houses and care for victims. That aid was dispensed by CDS community health workers who were members of the local FRAPH chapter. Supporters of Aristide—by far the majority of victims—could not safely claim any aid.

Boulos insists that he had no part in the violence and claims to have fired the most prominent FRAPH member employed at CDS. But two former CDS employees, interviewed by *In These Times* on condition of anonymity, claim to have been pressured directly by Boulos to support the coup government by organizing and participating in FRAPH demonstrations. Boulos calls these claims "outright lies."

Boulos' political ties notwithstanding, the work of his clinics raises fundamental questions about AID's long, checkered history of dubious humanitarianism. AID is the primary conduit of a host of health care, agricultural, environmental and economic programs that liberals defend as emblems of the true spirit of American generosity and that Sen. Jesse Helms derides as international welfare, or more specifically, "pouring money down Third-World rat holes." In reality, of course, AID's humanitarian programs hew closely to the aims of U.S. national security policy, often to the detriment of the people they are ostensibly designed to help. And the agency often plays hard ball with recalcitrant governments of recipient nations. AID, the World Bank and the IMF are holding hostage millions of promised dollars in loans and aid because the Haitian government has not moved fast enough to privatize state industries—despite the overwhelming opposition among Haitians and their newly elected parliament to neoliberal economic policies.

AID boasts that it delivers primary medical care to 3 million Haitians through contractors like Boulos' clinic. In fact, it has served to advance a central U.S. foreign policy priority in the Third World—population control. Nearly half of the agency's health care spending in Haiti is taken up by the Private Sector Family Planning Program, under which so-called NGOs dispense birth control methods, and each of the other programs—including the "Expanded Urban Health Services" program, which funds Boulos' CDS—has a substantial family planning component.

Through such programs, AID has aggressively promoted the use of the controversial contraceptive Norplant, plastic capsules or silicone rods implanted under the skin that release a hormonal contraceptive slowly over five years. Research on Norplant use in the developed world has shown the device to cause a range of side effects common to progestin contraceptives: headache, depression, loss of libido, weight change, hair loss, nausea and acne. Some studies indicate that as many as 80 percent of Norplant recipients experience a dramatic change in the menstrual cycle, including prolonged bleeding, heavy bleeding, spotting and amenorrhea (stopping of the cycle altogether).

These side effects, say women's health activists, make Norplant particularly unsuitable for Haiti. As many as 39 percent of women who get Norplant report prolonged or even constant menstrual bleeding for up to a year. In desperately poor Haiti, where the overwhelming majority

of women already live on the nutritional edge, the bleeding poses a much greater risk of health complications—*anemia*, for instance—than in rich countries. Nonetheless, despite these dangers, AID deemed Third World women, including Haitians, a suitable subject population for testing Norplant—tests which ultimately led to the implant's approval by the U.S. Federal Drug Administration in 1990. Boulos' CDS was one of three sites in Haiti where studies began in 1985.

Concerned about Norplant's medical impact, the *Koalisyon 28 Jiyé Chalmay Peral*, a Haitian women's advocacy group based in New York, interviewed women and health care workers in Haiti. Their research, published in early 1991 in a Creole-language health education pamphlet entitled "Norplant: Piki Senk An" (Norplant: The Five Year Injection), found a pattern of abuses similar to those noted in Norplant trials in Bangladesh and other countries: coerced participation, the payment of incentives to workers to recruit women and refusal to remove the implant.

Once the FDA approved Norplant, AID opened the international floodgates for its distribution, particularly to Haiti. According to 1993 documents, AID/Haiti negotiated with Washington "for provision of 20,000 sets of implants over the next two years [1993-95], which will make it the largest AID-funded Norplant program worldwide." And as AID has enshrined Norplant as its contraceptive method of choice in Haiti, it has ignored economic as well as medical side effects. In a recent BBC documentary, medical anthropologist Catherine Maternowska reported that some implant recipients she worked with bled continuously for as long as 18 months. Haitian women, Maternowska explained, can't get Kotex or tampons; they use rags, which need to be washed every morning—"not a simple task at all in Haiti." To buy soap, women are forced to sacrifice scarce financial resources that would otherwise buy food, water, fuel and other vital necessities.

To make matters worse, AID's push to dramatically expand Norplant use in Haiti coincided with an explicit campaign on the agency's part to facilitate birth control by "demedicalizing," or liberalizing, the delivery of all methods. A 1993 internal evaluation of AID's family-planning programs in Haiti recommended that "breast and pelvic exams, although desirable to enhance a woman's health, should not be mandatory to obtain the pill. Changing this practice is of highest priority in terms of decreasing barriers and promoting free method choice." Like the pill and other hormonal methods, Norplant requires careful monitoring, including regular pap smears. Yet, over and over, internal AID documents dismiss mandatory pap smears, cervical exams and other health interventions as "medical barriers to contraception."

AID rationalizes demedicalization in Haiti, as in other developing countries, by arguing that the risks associated with childbirth exceed those associated with various family-planning methods. In fact, U.S.-funded family-planning

programs in Haiti have been dangerously demedicalized from the beginning. In 1978, an AID pilot family-planning project sent workers to four to five households a day to distribute four cycles of oral contraceptives, four cans of foam, or a box of 100 condoms to all women aged 15 to 49. The distributors, described in a professional journal as uneducated and barely literate, were "trained" to "screen" for medical contraindications of pills—vision problems, headache, jaundice, varicose veins, breast masses, breastfeeding of less than eight to nine months, and pregnancy. The screening consisted of "taking a brief history and observing the clients."

Such an atmosphere of gross negligence only compounds the danger posed to women by the already controversial drug, particularly when the implant needs to be removed. Norplant's manufacturers and distributors insist that removal is a simple procedure, but at least three separate class action suits are being prepared in the United States against the manufacturers and physicians as a result of injuries received on removal. The capsules tend to migrate in the arm, and finding them can be difficult and painful, often causing scarring and sometimes serious nerve damage.

Haitian women face the same problems—when, that is, they can get the Norplant removed at all. For example, at St. Croix Hospital in Léogane, site of the 1978 pilot project, requests for removal are rarely granted. Former clinic director Dr. Judith Brown told *In These Times* that over a two-year period, fewer than 1 percent of Norplant users had the implant removed. A California study of Norplant acceptability, by contrast, revealed that nearly half of North American women had their implants removed within two years. This startling difference in removal rates appears to be the result of a gauntlet of financial and "community education" hurdles which Haitian women must overcome before they can get their Norplants out.

Dr. Brown insists that women who accept any contraceptive method are fully informed of the risks, side effects and benefits of the methods in advance. A woman requesting Norplant removal in Léogane must go through a series of "education" sessions. If, on a second or third visit, a woman insists, the implant will be removed. However, unless the clinic staff determines that she "has a serious medical problem," she is charged a fee of \$80 [\$30 U.S.] for removal within the first two years—even though AID provides it free and the fee constitutes some 20 percent of the average Haitian's annual income.

Nonetheless, Brown defends the removal fee. "Norplant is expensive," she says. "U.S. AID and the program have made a significant investment in [these women]." Boulos denounces the fees, even though CDS uses community health workers to discourage removal.

The protests against Boulos are starting to make waves beyond Cité Soleil. CDS is also home to a huge AID- and

National Institutes for Health-funded medical research operation run by Johns Hopkins University, and a group of Hopkins graduate students recently called for a formal investigation into Boulos' operations. On November 5, the Johns Hopkins *News-Letter* published an article on the protests and the criticism of CDS by international human rights organizations. Patrick Bond, a faculty member at Hopkins' School of Public Health, told the *News-Letter* after a trip to Haiti that anti-Boulos graffiti is everywhere. "This is no ordinary public health clinic," Bond said. "People associate Boulos with paramilitary terrorism and, I must say, this is severely affecting Hopkins' reputation."

To his Haitian critics, Dr. Boulos represents the seamless bond between the U.S. government's ostensibly humanitarian efforts and its long history of supporting Haitian paramilitaries and dictators. Dr. Boulos sits at the nexus between the two—to his supporters in Washington and Baltimore he is a humanitarian unjustly suffering scorn from people he is trying to help. Dr. Neal Halsey, who directs Hopkins' research at CDS, defended Boulos to the *News-Letter*: "Being a leader means that you are automatically the target of criticism, especially in settings of extreme poverty and political instability. As a successful leader ... CDS has been the source of envy and a political target by other Haitian organizations."

Haitian women's health activist Rosann August, who received the Reebok International Human Rights award last year for her work exposing the use of rape as a political weapon by FRAPH and the Haitian military, sums up the link between U.S. political and health policy: "U.S. health policy is from the same agency that overthrew the government. [In Cité Soleil,] they've taken over everything—health, literacy, justice. Where they've invested millions, there's no improvement in health. Eighty percent of the people are desperate and illiterate, but the programs are cosmetic and immediate. The problem is social inequality."

John Canham-Clyne is a freelance writer based in Washington. Worth Cooley-Probst, a research consultant and medical writer, is a board member of the Washington Office on Haiti.

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*How to
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housing work
in a time of
tight budgets.*

By J.S. Fuerst

In his 1991 book, *There Are No Children Here*, Alex Kotlowitz introduced America to “Lafayette” and “Pharoah,” two little boys growing up in the Henry Horner Homes, a notoriously tough housing project on Chicago’s West Side. It was a bleak book, and its vision of Horner was unrelentingly grim.

As he chronicled the material and emotional deprivation that plagued Lafayette, Pharoah and so many of the project’s residents, Kotlowitz suggested that the United States in 1991 no longer possessed the political will necessary to make low-income housing like Henry Horner viable.

If anything, the prospects for subsidized housing seem even worse today. Republicans in both the House and Senate have introduced bills that would eliminate the

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). And in Philadelphia, Atlanta and Newark, public housing projects have all come under the wrecking ball.

Ironically, it is at this dark hour that Horner residents are finally seeing some light at the end of the tunnel. Currently, Horner is undergoing a \$75 million renovation. One would like to believe that a chastened Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)—which was taken over by HUD officials in May—is trying to disprove Kotlowitz’s depressing conclusion. In fact, a simple quirk of urban geography probably explains the expenditure at Horner. The development is located just blocks away from the city’s mammoth new United Center, home to Chicago’s Bulls, Blackhawks and—this summer—to the Democratic National Convention.

With the Democrats returning to Chicago for the first time since the disastrous ’68 convention, party officials are apparently intent on insuring that nothing—not even an untidy backdrop—will mar this year’s affair. Reportedly, one of the key reasons HUD took over the chronically mismanaged CHA was because the agency had fallen behind in its plans to rehab certain projects by the time of the convention. (See “The second city’s second ghetto,” June 26.)

But whatever the motivation behind the renovation, this infusion of cash into long-neglected Horner is proving the viability of a project that had been written off by both liberals and conservatives. One of the most controversial components of the \$75 million plan was the proposal to either renovate or raze the Horner Annex, a 109-unit complex directly across the street from the United Center. Late last month, the CHA allowed Annex residents to vote on the future of their building, promising that tenants would be eligible for a variety of housing options—including vouchers and slots in scattered-site apartments—if they voted for demolition. Nevertheless, the residents voted overwhelmingly for renovation. “Why would anyone want to go anywhere else?” 25-year Horner resident Sarah Ruffin asked a Chicago Tribune reporter. “It’s a really great place to live now, and it’s going to be even better once it’s remodeled.”

That vote says something profound about the potential of government-supported housing. Even in CHA projects, reputedly the nation’s worst, residents still believe fiercely that public housing can stabilize and improve their lives.

Over the last year, I’ve interviewed more than 100 former and current residents of Chicago public housing. And in those interviews people have spoken candidly about what makes projects work, and also what causes them to fail. Cordell Reed, a senior vice president of Commonwealth Edison, fondly remembers his youth in the Ida B. Wells Homes on the Near South Side. “Our family flourished in Ida Wells,” says Reed, who moved to the project as a tod-

dler in 1940. Reed remembers a community of stable, if economically strapped, families who lived in well-maintained buildings. And Reed's idyllic memories of Chicago public housing are anything but unique. James Fletcher, president of Chicago's South Shore Bank also lived in Wells during the 1940s. "Ida B. Wells was a great place to grow up," Fletcher says. "I couldn't have wanted a better childhood."

Back then, the CHA carefully screened tenants, sought a mix of working families and delicately moved to integrate public housing. Under executive director Elizabeth Wood, the CHA was known as one of the nation's most innovative housing agencies. In 1960, however, Wood was fired for pushing integration too aggressively. The CHA has been on a downward spiral ever since.

In 1966, a CHA tenant named Dorothy Gautreaux filed suit against the agency, charging that the agency was systematically segregating public housing in black neighborhoods. In 1967, a federal judge ruled in Gautreaux's favor and said no new housing could be built in black neighborhoods until 700 hundred units were first built in white neighborhoods. The CHA responded by halting virtually all new construction. In response, the *Gautreaux* plaintiffs again filed suit. This time, the courts ordered the CHA to give residents housing vouchers that they could use in a six-county area around Chicago. Since that policy was implemented, some 5,700 families have been relocated to outlying suburbs. But that dispersal of black families concerns many within the African-American community. As Cordell Reed notes, "I see no reason to send black families out to the far suburbs, particularly poor black families. We should have housing developments close in and black families should, if they choose to, be able to live with other black families. The only absolute is that there must be freedom of choice and the mixing of economic groups."

In Chicago, the *Gautreaux* solution has been no solution. In the last 27 years, only 2,000 units of scattered-site housing have been built. Of these 2,000 units, 90 percent of them were built in minority-occupied areas, and minorities comprise 90 percent of their residents. Meanwhile, 48,000 families remain on the waiting list for this new housing. In short, the program failed to promote significant racial integration. At best, it's been a stop-gap measure; at worst, it has diverted dwindling resources away from programs that could make public housing livable for the vast majority of residents. In the meantime, Chicago's public housing projects continue to deteriorate and politicians seem increasingly eager to raze them rather than renovate them.

At Cabrini-Green, where buildings have already been demolished, residents are wary of CHA plans to make way for new mixed-income housing by leveling already existing apartments. Cabrini, surrounded by some of the city's prime real estate, has long been eyed by private developers. Hattie Calvin, a 30-year-resident of Cabrini-Green who heads the project's Local Advisory Council, says "it's disgraceful for the CHA to be tearing down these projects ... when they

have been responsible for bringing in the destructive tenants. Moreover they have not maintained the developments in the way that the earlier administration did. They should evict the 25 percent who are destructive so the remaining tenants can live satisfactory lives. Tearing them down is hurting the victim."

Unfortunately, as many Chicago housing activists continue to search for permutations in the *Gautreaux* process that can provide new housing for low-income residents, they have lost sight of the fundamental factors that make public housing work. New York City, in marked contrast to Chicago, has some of the nation's best public housing. And instead of embracing small scattered-site units, New York has recently been developing "vest pocket projects," developments with from 100 to 400 apartments. These new developments are racially integrated and serve varied income groups. In Toronto, a city renowned for its livable public housing, virtually no scattered-site units exist. Almost all of the city's publicly subsidized apartments—which account for 35 percent of the Toronto's rental market—are in vest-pocket projects ranging in size from 100 to 300 units.

New York City's housing authority also continues to carefully screen tenants for its buildings. (Far from being a reactionary system, the screening process includes an appeals process for applicants denied entry.) Leftists and liberals must confront the fact that unruly tenants have to be evicted from public housing. In interview after interview, past and present CHA residents complain that the agency's decline stemmed from the its failure to screen incoming residents. So, what happens to families denied admission to or evicted from public housing? Oftentimes, they return to the private housing market. In some cases, they go to more structured residences—such as half-way houses. And in the most severely dysfunctional families, children can be removed and placed in foster care.

Rent policies must also be reconfigured so that working families remain in public housing as a stabilizing force. The HUD ruling that forces families to pay 30 percent of their income for rent has eliminated almost all upward striving families from public developments. It must be modified to include a reasonable market rent as a ceiling. That move would encourage role model families to remain. And finally, there must a radical change in the management of public housing. Administrators must be selected who believe that public housing can work. Vince Lane, the former chairman of the CHA, repeatedly stated that government-supported housing has never worked and must be supplanted by privatization.

Quite clearly, the experience of the long-term CHA tenants I've interviewed indicates unambiguously that government-operated housing can be successful if operated wisely and humanely. As the Horner Annex residents showed with their vote, it is far better to renovate public housing than abandon it altogether. ◀

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I N T H E A R T S

Treacly Dick

N

In this surprisingly sympathetic portrait of Nixon, Oliver Stone never quite reveals the man beneath the five o'clock shadow.

By Pat Dowell

Nixon is an Oliver Stone movie for people who don't really like Oliver Stone movies. This will be good news to some and not to others. Personally, I prefer the wild man Stone to the more judicious one at work in *Nixon*. One senses in this surprisingly sympathetic portrait of the Darth Vader of American politics a certain stylistic caution uncharacteristic of Stone. The conscientious term-paper inclusiveness and decorous narrative of *Nixon* belongs more to the *Heaven and Earth* wing of the Stone corpus than to the Wagnerian excess of *Natural Born Killers* and *JFK*.

Structured a bit too obviously like *Citizen Kane*, Stone's movie begins with Richard Nixon's symbolic death during the final days of Watergate and then works its way back through his life in search of the man's wellspring. From the

bunker of his White House study, Nixon's mind and the screenplay wander through his Quaker upbringing, his political triumphs and his legendary downfall. The accumulation of detail is meticulous, almost archaeological, peeling back layer upon layer of tiny fragments, from Nixon's favorite condiment (ketchup) to his omnipresent cocktail (scotch on the rocks). The movie concludes with Nixon's farewell speech, though over the credits Stone tacks on footage of Nixon's 1994 funeral, complete with Clinton's eulogy—a bad idea that seems to ask us to take at face value the empty praise that politicians reserve for state occasions.

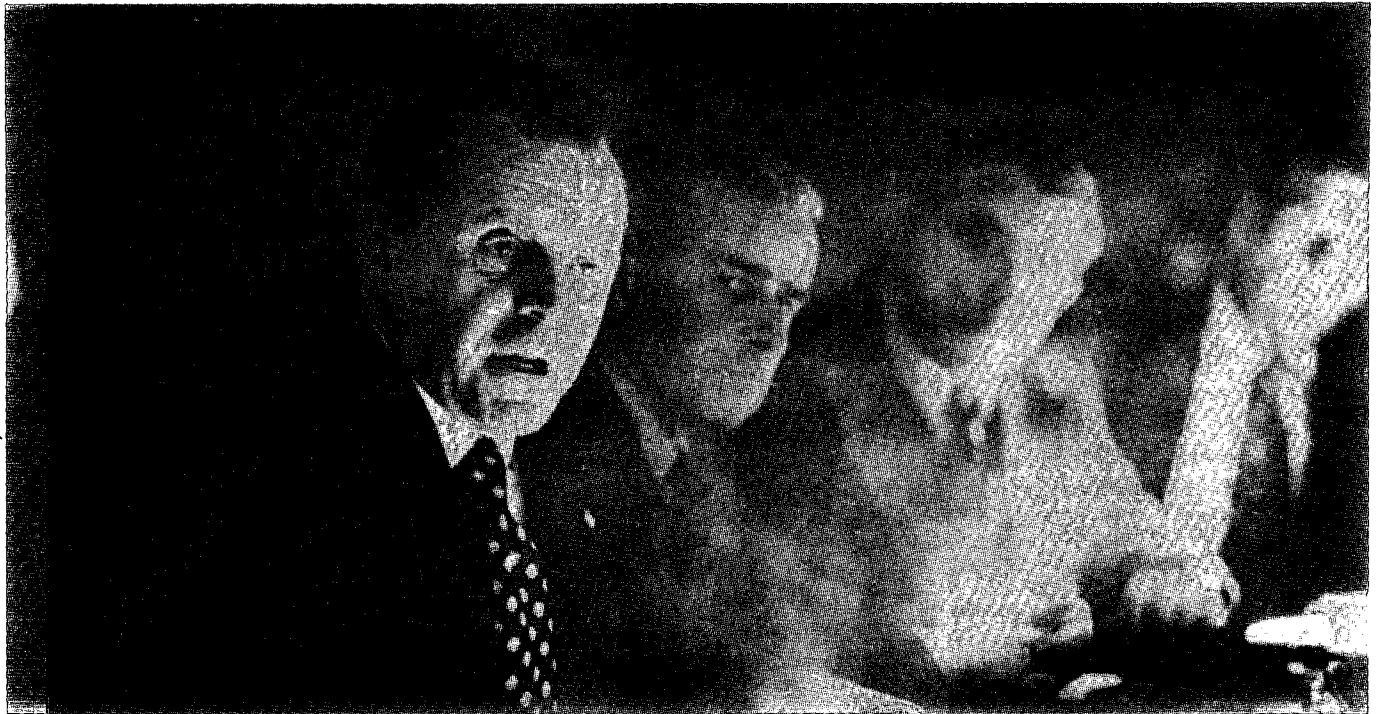
We had every right to expect that Oliver Stone wouldn't settle for that sort of official piety. Certainly the film's casting contradicted the obvious. That Anthony Hopkins should be asked to play Richard Nixon—an iconic American to whom the Welsh actor bears no physical or vocal resemblance—suggests that Stone had more in mind than docudrama. And once the shock of seeing Hopkins in Nixon makeup subsides, he succeeds

in his performance. Hopkins has folded his stocky physique into the clenched body armor of Nixon, and he palpably exudes the fearfulness, the physical embarrassment, that always seemed to plague the man in public appearances. Hopkins also brings mouthfuls of Shakespearean tragedy to this most American of men. But ultimately, like the movie as a whole, he fails to illuminate Nixon, to reveal his essence in the way that Joan Allen does Pat Nixon's. Allen has the same kind of matronly watchfulness that one always sensed in Pat, the passion for respectability that was so disgusted by the brazen slovenliness of the Sixties.

One of the surprising emotions retrieved from memory by Stone's *Nixon* is how painful it was to watch Richard and Pat Nixon on television. They were indeed the dark side of America's devotion to sunny family values, always looking as though they had been caught in some terrible circumstance and were determined to put the best face on it—the Ozzie and Harriet of discomfort. Stone has always been acutely sensitive to this forlorn aspect of American culture, this obsession with the appearance of happiness, and he astutely finds its perfect symbols in the Nixons.

In fact, the domestic revelations of *Nixon* are far more sophisticated than the political insights. Pat's resentment of her husband's blind ambition, the agony of his public failures, the growing distance between them as Watergate unravels—all these intimacies seem painfully real and sometimes even shocking. And no scenes are more jarring than when the Nixons actually seem happy together.

Considering how fascinating Hopkins and Allen are, it's surprising how little fun there is to be had in watching James Woods play Nixon's famous hatchet man, H. R.



Nixon Haldeman (this is Woods on
Directed by Prozac). And J. T. Walsh makes
Oliver Stone the other Nixon lieutenant, John
Ehrlichman, into something of a
bland good guy. Bob Hoskins gets

about five minutes as J. Edgar Hoover, which he most memorably spends cruising an underage waiter. The portrait of Hoover is, deservedly, far from flattering. But the scene produces the same queasiness that I felt on seeing *JFK*, where corruption was also equated with homosexual license.

In terms of history and politics, the movie is hamstrung by Stone's failure to have settled on a key to the man—or, in light of how often *Citizen Kane* is invoked, perhaps I should say, to find his Rosebud. Clearly, Stone has more respect for Nixon than anyone suspected. He sees Nixon, apparently, as some kind of idealist whose intelligence and ambition to do good were corrupted and thwarted by the beast of politics—this despite the fact that almost from the beginning of his career Nixon seemed eager to make American politics a little beastlier.

The movie is threaded through with half-hints that Nixon's downfall figured in some tangled CIA plot that first precipitated the assassination of JFK and then mushroomed into the Watergate cover-up. (If you're inclined toward such selective readings of history, you can peruse Stone's explanation in the heavily annotated screenplay just published by Hyperion Books.) Stone introduces a cabal of shadowy and menacing Texas millionaires, led by a suave Larry Hagman, who gather on the dusty plains—not once, but twice—to conspire against a sitting president. At the first meeting, just prior to Kennedy's assassination in Dallas, they speak menacingly of JFK and pledge their loyalty to a clearly uncomfortable Nixon. At a second conclave, held during his reign, Nixon

rejects their reactionary demands to roll back the civil rights advances of the '60s. This, Stone hints, may have moved them to undo Nixon as well. One of the movie's most memorable moments, no more than a detail, takes place at one of these Texas meetings, when Nixon sits talking to a blonde bombshell obviously provided for his amusement by these macho fascists. She keeps trying to entice her charge to head upstairs, but Nixon makes small talk, doggedly immune to her charms, and one senses that it's a moral position. Never does he seem so cloddishly endearing as in that moment.

But these devices have the net effect of absolving Nixon, as though he were the victim of sinister dark forces instead of being one himself. I can't help thinking that part of the movie's problem is that Stone identifies too closely with Nixon, bizarre as that idea at first appears, considering Nixon's role in the Vietnam War, which is Stone's personal ground zero. Nixon battled the press, Stone battles the press. Nixon's paranoia was legendary, Stone's has become, accurately or not, part of his public persona. Both, you might fairly say, were professionally shaped by the fate of John Kennedy.

To be fair, *Nixon* is no whitewash. It is more candid than any previous cinematic treatment of the late president in revealing the extent of Nixon's anti-Semitism. The film is strongest when Stone explores the man's haunting limitations. It becomes clear that Stone sees Nixon as an American everyman. As he prepares to leave the White House in disgrace, Nixon gazes at JFK's pensive White House portrait, and says, "They look at you and see what they want to be, they look at me and see what they are." It's a great moment and a brilliant line, and after three hours, the closest this movie gets to understanding what the life of Richard Milhous Nixon had to say about America. ◀

IN PRINT

The cul-de-sacs of crack

By Joel Robbins

Of all the distressing things about crack, the one for which there is no excuse is the impoverished public discourse that ordinarily surrounds it in mainstream America. In its most pernicious form, the dominant mythology of crack becomes a sort of single-bullet theory, in which the drug figures as virtually the only piece of ammunition used in the assassination of urban America. The poor have always been with us, this theory holds, and they have always been more or less miserable. But once a cheap, rapidly addictive high became available, it robbed them of their powers of reason and self-control, causing them to lose sight of family values, become spectacularly violent, and tear themselves and anyone unlucky enough to cross their path to pieces. In this simplistic scenario, the drug itself is to be blamed for the plight of urban America.

As if caught up in a wave of '70s nostalgia, those who make this argument imply that if we could just go back to the era when cocaine and heroin were expensive and marijuana, barbiturates, amphetamines and alcohol were the most affordable drugs around, then everything would be all right. The poor would still be miserable, but they would not be nearly so dangerous to others.

In his powerful book about crack dealers in New York's El Barrio (also known as East or Spanish Harlem), Philippe Bourgois demonstrates in devastating detail the naiveté of such simple-minded theories. Bourgois shows that, as major changes transformed the American economy, the spread of crack was largely a symptom and not a cause of the increasing misery of life in El Barrio over the last 15 years. In the process, Bourgois makes it clear that to think of El Barrio's current situation primarily in terms of a "drug problem" is to act in bad faith.

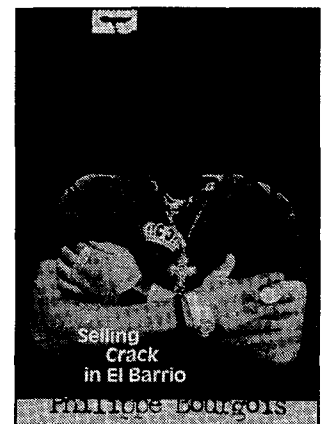
And he does so in an accessible, gut-wrenching book focused on the lives of El Barrio crack dealers. An anthropologist at San Francisco State University, Bourgois spent three and a half years, between the beginning of 1985 and the end of 1990, living with his wife and infant son in an East Harlem tenement. The book draws extensively on "thousands of pages of transcriptions" of tape-recorded interviews Bourgois conducted with crack dealers. These exchanges often occurred in the wee hours of morning as

gunshots rang out more or less in the distance and the dealers, off work, shared bottles of malt liquor with Bourgois and sniffed heroin and cocaine among themselves.

In reporting these conversations, Bourgois conveys a rounded sense of the lives of these dealers, of the choices they make and the constraints under which they make them. He succeeds in his goal of evoking the "individual experience of social structural oppression" in a neighborhood in which, according to the 1990 census, 39.8 percent of the largely Puerto Rican and New York-born "Nuyorican" population lived below the federal poverty line.

These accounts of the lives of individual crack dealers form a picture of the complex ways in which Nuyorican culture interacts with racially and sexually inflected forces of postindustrial economic oppression to create this cruelly narrow range of choices. Readers are made to understand, step by painful step, how resourceful people, many of them intelligent and articulate, become dealers who sell crack to their neighbors and, as Bourgois regretfully notes, participate in the violent destruction of their communities—and often of themselves as well. Effectively reversing received wisdom in the propaganda-laden "war on drugs," Bourgois argues that the years since 1985 have been so much worse in El Barrio not because crack is so much worse than other drugs, but because the shift from a manufacturing to a service economy and its deeply ratcheting economic polarization have left this community with no effective footholds in mainstream economic life. Bourgois meticulously documents how crack afflicts those who can find no legal alternatives to the equal-opportunity hiring practices and quick cash returns of the crack economy.

Even so, El Barrio residents tangled up in the crack economy still struggle to elude it—thus dispelling the myth that crack dealing is an enticing, all-consuming lifestyle. The dealers Bourgois focuses on—relatively low-level employees of a single supplier and crack-house owner—continued off and on throughout the time Bourgois lived among them to look for legal employment. Contrary to popular imagery, none of them is getting rich selling crack, and they are well informed, and wary, of the dangers of their occupation. Yet the entry-level jobs open to Nuyorican high school dropouts in the growing service economy—jobs as mail-room clerks, errand boys and messengers in publishing, advertising and computer services companies—provide no security. Worse, they demand an Anglo-American interpersonal style that is often impossible



**In Search of Respect:
Selling Crack in El Barrio**
By Philippe Bourgois
Cambridge University Press
392 pp., \$24.95

for these young Nuyoricans to affect. When manufacturing jobs were available, the shop floor could accommodate a tough masculine style, and unions allowed for the viable expression of macho antagonism toward management. In the service economy, however, where middle-class politesse sets the tone, aggressive, street-smart masculine behavior has no place. When Nuyorican workers violate unfamiliar middle-class codes, they read the rebukes that follow as instances in which they have been dissed. They feel an especially pointed sort of humiliation when their usually female bosses reprimand them directly, in unknowing defiance of the macho logic of Nuyorican culture.

These cultural clashes in the workplace, along with the often cruel hiring and firing practices that prevail in this era of flexible production, make the world of legal labor a continuing trial for the men Bourgois studied. In search of a viable alternative, they turn to crack dealing, "embroiling themselves in the underground economy and proudly embracing street culture" as a way to regain self-respect through work that does not constantly confront them with their "social marginalization" from mainstream America.

El Barrio's women arguably have it worse. Though they often encounter the most damaging forms of mainstream culture's racism and sexism in the capriciously abusive workings of the welfare system, they are also subject to the violence of their men. Even readers who have long understood the double-binds of the welfare system will be horrified by the mean-spiritedness of the system as it is revealed through the experiences of these women. The welfare department's bewildering bureaucratic demands and unwarranted terminations introduce dangerous instabilities into already fragile and insecure households. Meanwhile, the practice of reducing benefits when mothers find work makes entry into the legal economy a loser's game. And while the welfare system effectively bars them from legal employment, the street culture and the underground economy do not provide Nuyorican women the sense of self-respect that men can obtain from them.

Indeed, with rare exceptions, women on the street in this book appear only as gang rape victims or as crack addicts, often engaged in sex-for-crack prostitution. In their domestic roles, as mothers, girlfriends and wives, they suffer neglect and physical abuse at the hands of men who cannot find the kind of work that would allow them to support their families. Indeed, it is in their failed attempts to establish nuclear families against crushing odds that one most clearly recognizes the agonies that young people endure in El Barrio. "Primo," one of the main characters in the book, explains the hopes of forming a family he harbored when his first child was born—hopes dashed when he was moved from the 4-to-12 p.m. shift to the 2-to-10 a.m. shift at U.S. Litho and then promptly fired: He'd fallen asleep on the job after spending his days babysitting his infant son while the child's mother worked another job off the books. Similarly, "Luis" talks about stealing car radios "like a madman" to

buy his children new clothes for the first day of school. In the face of accounts like these, one realizes how absurdly bankrupt are conservative claims that a lack of family values tears poor families apart. Rather, in El Barrio, it is largely the *embrace* of these values in circumstances making them impossible to realize that creates the self-destructive misery behind the violence and misogyny of the street culture.

In Search of Respect is a severely disturbing book. In the tradition of the best anthropological studies, readers will find themselves caught up in the logic of what for most of them is an alien way of life. Middle-class platitudes about the pathetic hopelessness of the poor, who live tragic lives almost mercifully cut short, are overwhelmed by the evidence here. El Barrio residents are obviously active and struggling, trying hard to make the best choices in a world where in fact almost all the choices are bad. As readers begin to make these choices with them, and to follow them as the choices lead to inevitable failure, those of us not living in poverty can begin to at least sense the all-encompassing and destructive qualities of its embrace. If it achieves nothing else, this book is a good tonic against the blame-the-victim, blame-the-drug explanations of poverty and the misguided solutions to the problem they engender.

Ideally, one would want a book so clearly capable of evoking passionate response in its readers to come equipped with an equally engaging set of recommendations for action. In this regard, however, Bourgois treads lightly. He despairs over "the inevitable limits of political feasibility" and offers only a few lightly sketched "short-term" policy recommendations that, in their brevity and generality, stand in stark contrast to the detailed portrait of El Barrio life that precedes them. In an almost desultory way he lists decriminalizing drugs, reforming the welfare system and providing improved public services as possible short-term solutions. Clearly, providing reasonably attractive entry-level employment is also crucial. Readers are also left in the dark about any role that mediating institutions may or may not play in resolving the cultural crisis behind the crack epidemic—we hear nothing about the Catholic Church, for example. Indeed, comparative analysis, which Bourgois does not undertake, might bear out one's suspicions that in certain segments of the African-American community, Christian and Islamic congregations can offer reasonably firm foundations for self-respect.

In any case, Bourgois has done a remarkable job in his project of humanizing "the public enemies of the United States without sanitizing or glamorizing them." Bourgois' book lays the single-bullet theory to rest once and for all. Now comes the much harder task of seeing beyond the rhetoric of the drug war to confront the real causes of American poverty and social marginalization. ◀

Joel Robbins, a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Virginia, has written for *Social Analysis* and *Ethnology*, among other publications.

PC in our time

By John Palattella

In the prelude to *The Sixties*, his sweeping history of the New Left, Todd Gitlin recounts a 1958 panel discussion at Brandeis University featuring a bitter exchange between James A. Wechsler, former editor of the liberal *New York Post*, and Jack Kerouac, beatnik demigod. Drunk on brandy, Kerouac delivered a manifesto on "beatitude" to a boisterous crowd before cashiering Wechsler, that most sad tribune of liberalism, who was scandalized by liberal forecasts of the end of ideology amid all-too-persistent poverty and nonplussed by Kerouac's skylarking beyond the realm of politics. On that night, in Gitlin's account, "two worlds passed through each other like ghosts."

One wonders how much Gitlin sensed editor Wechsler's ghost peering over his shoulder when he was writing *The Twilight of Common Dreams*. Gitlin dramatizes a conflict between three parties: the right, comprised of media moguls, well-heeled fundraisers, Cold War liberals and foundation-funded journalists; a revitalized New Left, imagined by Todd Gitlin; and a politically moribund countercultural left, a mélange of policy-makers and educators who advocate "multiculturalism" as a solution to political problems.

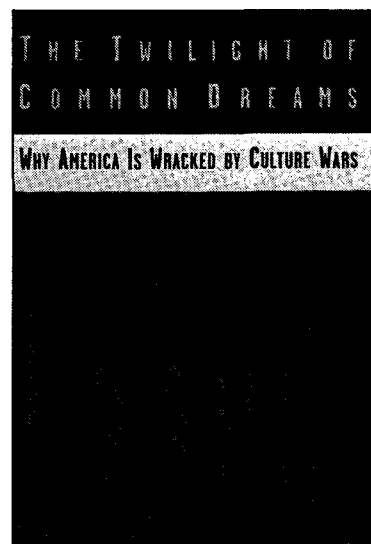
Gitlin follows the logic of this showdown in a compelling first chapter that focuses on a 1992 controversy in the Oakland public school system. The partisans weren't fighting over the genuine perils that California's then-raging fiscal crisis posed for public education; rather, they were torn apart by ideological hairsplitting over the use of revisionist history textbooks in city schools. Gitlin uses this case study to delineate a key premise of his book: The inconsolable fervor of multiculturalism conceals its false political bottom. "Instead of moving to organize against rock-bottom class inequalities and racial discrimination," Gitlin protests, "many activists chose to fight real and imagined symbols of insult." Gitlin critically recasts the drama of "political correctness," effectively demonstrating that if the culture wars are political, they constitute a politics of posturing, gutted of any functional program.

Often Gitlin's criticism of the left is disarming because it cuts close to the bone. "Academic leftists ... talk about 'Gramscian intellectuals' who fuse ... 'class fractions' into

functioning 'historic blocs' by enunciating their common cause. In this light, no American in the latter half of the 20th century has been half so Gramscian as Ronald Reagan. He invoked a most historic bloc indeed." Remarks like this pepper Gitlin's argument, and they indicate that he is doing much more than merely belittling academic leftists. More importantly, Gitlin is re-examining his assumptions about the New Left's intellectual heritage as he takes stock of the grim political changes in American society over the past 15 years. Gitlin is also addressing ideologically hidebound fellow travelers, whom he offers the following lesson from his experiences in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the university and journalism: Simply to believe in the rectitude of a certain political commitment does not make it historically inevitable or even desirable.

Gitlin has few kind words for those multiculturalists who, drunk on sectarianism, are unable to focus on crucial political problems that overrun the margins of their fuzzy vision. "No political agenda comes out of the attack on Columbus," he writes, referring to a favorite target of multicultural leftists. "Instead, there's the assumption that all our problems stem from Columbus." This insistence that coherent politics can only flow from a coherent political agenda places Gitlin squarely in the company of Wechsler, whose commitment to racial integration and civil rights, and criticism of the stultifying blandishments of consumer capitalism, fell on the deaf ears of Kerouac and his following. Unlike Wechsler, however, Gitlin doesn't sound the death knell of politics past. He skirts the role of New Left elder statesman and never allows his lively, acute meditation on contemporary culture to devolve into an over-drawn lament.

The explosion of interest in political correctness, which stole across the national landscape in 1990 and has marred rational debate on the right and the left ever since, provides an ideal foil for Gitlin's searching critique of American political discourse. Indeed, a key precedent to *The Twilight of Common Dreams* is Gitlin's 1980 study, *The Whole World is Watching*, which deftly analyzed CBS and *New York Times* coverage of SDS from 1965 to 1970. (Gitlin served as president of SDS in 1963.) The current book, like



The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars
By Todd Gitlin
Metropolitan Books
294 pp., \$25

its predecessor, documents how the mainstream media are drawn to volatile issues not due to "liberal bias," as critics on the right ritually intone, but rather by economic interest: the need to convert and contain the desire for radical change into the desire for sensational cultural novelties. Thus the corporate media highlighted Jerry Rubin's discovery of Wall Street and ignored fellow Chicago Seven defendant Dave Dellinger, who remained a radical activist. And now the press regularly covers National Endowment for the Humanities imbroglios instead of investigating the policy issues that protect bloated defense budgets.

As Gitlin argues, this economic attraction is matched by a core ideological affinity between the mainstream media and right-wing partisans of the culture wars. The interests of the PC-obsessed media nicely merged with the Bush administration's desperate need to launch a fresh ideological crusade following the conclusion of the Cold War. The ensuing "debate" over political correctness was framed to trivialize and demonize the radical left, while making the right's views seem natural and uncoerced. In a series of careful dissections of PC-charged attacks, Gitlin unmasks the media's persistent tendency to seize upon the PC debacle as the most violently apocalyptic moment in the radical left's history and to present PC as the movement's sum and substance.

Gitlin also shows how hacks like Dinesh D'Souza circulated claims about multiculturalism and its "reverse racism" that were indebted more to John Birch Society rhetoric than to the Enlightenment standards that they so fervently defended against left "irrationalism." For instance, Gitlin notes how D'Souza's anti-PC screed *Illiberal Education* cooked statistics on University of California at Berkeley admissions to artificially raise the number of worthy white and Asian applicants excluded under college affirmative action policies in 1989. Rampant grade inflation made the pool of high-caliber academic applicants seem larger than it actually was. In California, a 4.0 high school grade point average doesn't necessarily reflect a straight-A academic record, but rather a generous allotment of "bonus" grade points for performing well in college preparatory courses. The highly qualified applicants crowded out by affirmative action numbered no more than 500, Gitlin notes—not the "thousands" that D'Souza claimed. And, Gitlin observes, applicants admitted to Berkeley because of alumni legacies and athletic scholarships were far more numerous than were beneficiaries of affirmative action "set-asides."

Gitlin heaps opprobrium on the right both for overlooking its own demagogic flank and for failing to note how social disintegration issues not from liberal permissiveness but from the gross inequalities produced by consumer capi-

talism. Yet he doesn't let the left off the hook either. While the alarmist media warn that PC signals the left's political triumph, Gitlin insists that the culture wars represent the left's self-ordained "demobilization in a cloister." In Gitlin's view, far from being the left's apostles, too many multiculturalists are its apostates.

In much of the book, Gitlin ponders why worthy investigations of the suffering and dispossession of slaves, immigrants and hosts of other American Others all too often degenerate into petty squabbles among advocates of various fetishized "differences." These battles claim many casualties, but the chief loss, in Gitlin's view, is the hope for advancing a left-wing version of civic commonality—radical activism that redeems and extends traditional civic and political rights in accordance with the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights to effectively combat racial and income inequality. Because Gitlin saw the power of mobilizing around a shared civic culture during the heyday of Martin Luther King Jr.'s civil rights crusade, he can only puzzle over the contradictions that now beset the left agenda: Why do multiculturalists frown upon majoritarian thinking as a sign of accommodation to an oppressive dominant culture? And why, as Gitlin puts it, "have so many people who

have suffered grievously from the West's many abrogations of Enlightenment reason lost faith in the Enlightenment?"

Gitlin's corrosive judgment of the excesses of multicultural leftists stems from a befuddlement over the principles (or lack thereof) that underwrite their politics rather than the usual journalistic impulse to caricature and ridicule their views. He strives to understand the desperation that drives multiculturalists to control politically charged symbols such as curricula and textbooks because he can discern the broader common ground he shares with the multicultural left. He asserts that both he and the multiculturalists derive their skepticism of nationalism, for example, from "the Enlightenment's taste for human equality and diversity, its ideal of self-determination, its objection to arbitrary power."

Yet he cannot proclaim himself a comrade in the multicultural struggle. He laments that most multiculturalists take no serious account of the lessons of history or the organizing imperatives of politics. Gitlin argues that few in their ranks can clearly acknowledge, for example, the extent to which their preoccupation with "identities, perspectives, incommensurable world views and so forth" owes its existence to the very Enlightenment principles they are quick to despise: "the worth of all individuals, their right to dignity, and to a social order that satisfies it."

Through such miscues, multiculturalists elude the sphere of democratic radicalism that Gitlin favors. Gitlin reasons



that politics must be rooted in ecumenical notions of civic participation that entail the obligations of justice. Such a politics is not limited to procedural participation, such as voting or running for office. As Gitlin's recurring meditations on the subject imply, it also involves working from below, building coalitions and achieving majorities to press for, among other things, affordable housing, equitable education, income equality and a truly free press, protected from the meddling of both the government and the capitalist market.

This call for participatory democracy—in which some readers may hear more than a faint echo of SDS's 1962 Port Huron Statement—can provide the basis for a loosely federated common ground upon which the particularist respect for radical individual difference and the universalist extension of civil rights to all individuals can coexist. And it is heartening to note that recent events suggest that people besides Gitlin are trying to heed this call. The driving force behind the defeat of anti-gay ballot initiatives in Oregon, Idaho and Tampa, Fla., was the principle that people share a civic culture (a deep and abiding respect for civil rights) that can build the sort of "cross-difference" coalitions necessary to sustain a majoritarian left politics. (See "Out by law," *ITT*, December 11).

If at times Gitlin's perspective and prose lose their nuance and luster, it's because he deplores the thought of enduring another round of the separatism and purism that fragmented the left in the late '60s, propelling too many partisans away from a democratic coalition to sufism, est and assort-

ed other spectacles of self-improvement. "Enough bunkers!" *Twilight* concludes, with more than a little exasperation. "Enough of the perfection of differences! We ought to be building bridges."

In 1963, the Old Left editors of *Dissent* met with Gitlin, Tom Hayden and other SDS leaders to address, among other differences, the famed "anti-anti-Communist" platform of the Port Huron Statement. The young turks were as galvanized by an evening of generational conflict as Wechsler had been exasperated by it in his standoff with Kerouac five years earlier. To ventilate some pressure at the evening's end, *Dissent* editor and Austrian socialist refugee Joseph Buttinger presented Gitlin and Hayden each with a copy of his memoir, *In the Twilight of Socialism*. As Gitlin later told Maurice Isserman, "I remember Tom and I looking at each other knowingly, as if to say, 'Well, for these guys it's twilight, but we know better.'" In *The Twilight of Common Dreams*, Gitlin remains confident enough in the prospects for democratic radicalism to hope that people can organize to challenge the ways that capital and prejudice have driven 20th-century history. But as Gitlin looks anxiously to the near future, where he hopes a revitalized left will materialize, he knows that if he glances over his shoulder, he can see the sun setting fast, and perhaps hear the ghosts shudder in the damp, restlessly waiting to lumber out of their graves. ◀

John Palatella is a freelance writer based in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

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A plague on all houses

By Jeffrey L. Reynolds

December 1 has come and gone, taking with it yet another World AIDS Day. By now, museums observing the "day without art" have turned up their lights and uncovered their prize pieces. The red ribbons carefully applied to jacket lapels are beginning to fray, and the thousands of white candles have been extinguished and carefully stowed for next year's ceremonies. Most of America will settle back into quiet complacency, and another 40,000 of our loved ones will lose their lives in 1996.

After 15 years of dire predictions, urgent warnings and grim statistics, a few hours of halfhearted compassion seem to be the best we can do against an epidemic that we never wanted to acknowledge in the first place. Progress has been slow and is perennially threatened by the unrelenting illness, death and battle fatigue that silence voices of compassion. By all accounts, our nation's abysmal performance on AIDS deserves the scathing reviews it's received from authors such as Randy Shilts (*And the Band Played On*, 1987), Larry Kramer (*Reports from the Holocaust*, 1989), Gena Corea (*The Invisible Epidemic*, 1992) and, most recently, Elinor Burkett.

In her fiery new book, *The Gravest Show on Earth: America in the Age of AIDS*, Burkett depicts the AIDS crisis as a three-ring circus of self-serving negligence, petty politics and pure chicanery. The scene is fraught with clowns, bumbling bears and profiteering tricksters hawking simple solutions to complex problems. A gray skull with a big red nose adorns the cover of the book that struggles to be a second-decade version of *And the Band Played On*. Readers of both, however, quickly realize that while Elinor Burkett is an experienced journalist propelled by unrelenting outrage, she's no Randy Shilts.

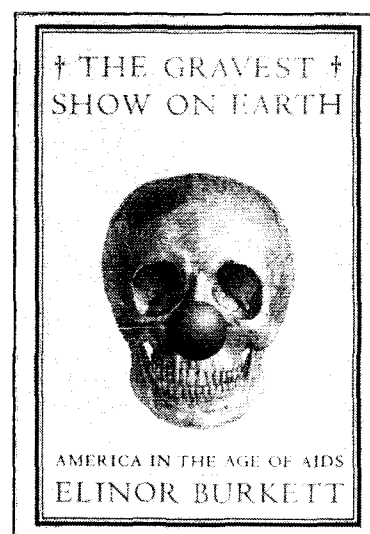
AIDS, of course, is no stranger to fury, and Burkett's stinging indictments are, for the most part, on target. Still, she almost tries too hard to be controversial, ripping apart virtually every institution, organization and individual involved in combating the epidemic, from Robert Gallo to Jonas Salk to Larry Kramer to Burroughs Wellcome to ACT UP, Gay Men's Health Crisis and the other 18,401 service organizations across the nation and beyond. This book is full of venom, and there are few sacred cows—a sign of either

truly objective journalism or a desire to sell more books.

While Burkett seems motivated in part by genuine concern, it's the latter principle that ultimately prevails. The reader's suspicions are aroused early on when she reports that her inspiration for the book wasn't her HIV-positive diagnosis, but a career move from New York to Florida, where she became a de facto AIDS reporter for the *Miami Herald*. "I started living with AIDS in 1988," she writes, candidly reminding readers that she's a latecomer to the scene. Unfortunately, Burkett's efforts to identify with those who have lived with the crisis for a much longer time and at a much greater personal cost soon degenerate into an all-out crusade to establish her credibility as an insider. She even stoops to traffic in trivial gossip, recounting, for example, who slept with whom at which AIDS conference.

Burkett's need to dole out universal condemnation, regardless of the facts, creates several larger inconsistencies that undermine the credibility of even her most valid points. For example, she attacks Jesse Helms' homophobia, but sounds a lot like the North Carolina senator when she consistently refers to gays and lesbians as "screeching" and "shrill activists" wearing leather jackets, bleached hair and nipple-rings. She also takes aim at the racism that has helped block access to HIV-prevention programs and care services, but sounds like Newt Gingrich when she suggests that "shooting galleries had become to black Americans what bathhouses had become to gay Americans." She denounces the government-sponsored sexism that has kept women out of drug trials and away from medical care, but then supports mandatory testing measures aimed squarely at pregnant women and their newborns.

As the tone of such indictments suggest, Burkett's book is thickly populated with villains, rogues and clowns—and only a handful of unlikely heroes. She has a special knack for making some of the gay community's best friends look like its worst enemies, and vice versa. She casts veteran activist Larry Kramer as an ego-crazed, tantrum-throwing child and vilifies treatment activists Peter Staley from Treatment Action Group and Martin Delaney from Project Inform for getting a bit



The Gravest Show on Earth: America in the Age of AIDS
By Elinor Burkett
Houghton Mifflin Co.
399 pp., \$24.95

too cozy with pharmaceutical companies. At the same time, she lauds the poster child for mandatory testing, Kimberly Bergalis (the Florida woman allegedly infected by her dentist), as well as Shepard Smith, director of the mislabeled Americans for a Sound AIDS Policy, a group that advocates mandatory HIV testing, involuntary partner notifications and abstinence-based education. Burkett's declarations of affection or condemnation seem to be governed by her own quirks—especially her distaste for public health policies that protect the privacy of those living with, or at risk for, HIV and AIDS.

Even when Burkett's judgment of character initially seems sound, it can falter, for singularly disquieting reasons. For instance, she correctly describes Terry McGovern, who runs the New York City-based HIV Law Project, as "a certifiable AIDS heroine." McGovern has battled aggressively with the Social Security Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration to gain women access to benefits, care and treatment. Disappointment sets in within a few pages, though, when Burkett takes her heroine to task for failing to agree with her unsubstantiated claim that contact tracing—the mandatory notification of sexual partners of those testing HIV-positive—has "the greatest potential for saving women's lives."

Contact tracing involves keeping a central registry of those who test positive and requiring them to name former sex partners so that a local health department official can pay them a visit—a prospect that would terrify most into avoiding an HIV test at any cost. Burkett ignores the success of aggressive prevention initiatives that have reduced infection rates through voluntary testing, and conveniently overlooks the possible consequences of contact tracing in a society that has a long, unflattering history of discrimination and violence against women. Unable to find any feminists who agree with her, Burkett goes on the offensive; she characterizes gay male activists who oppose the policy as uncaring, paranoid and willing to sacrifice women at the altar of confidentiality.

Though such scattershot judgments leave Burkett with few allies among AIDS activists, she can claim at least one influential partisan: New York state Assemblywoman Nettie Mayersohn. The Queens lawmaker was relatively unknown until 1993, when she stunned progressive groups that had considered her an ally by introducing contact tracing legislation and another bill that would have mandated HIV testing for all newborns—and disclosure of the results to the mother, whether she would want them or not. Like the mandatory notification policies of contact tracing, Mayersohn's "baby AIDS" proposals appeal to Burkett. She clearly shares Mayersohn's paternalistic belief that women are incapable of making decisions about HIV-testing without the help of public health officials.

Mayersohn and her staff launched a fiery tirade against AIDS activists, accusing them (much as Burkett does) of being more concerned about gay privacy rights than public

health. In response, countless physicians and public health experts explained that, although all infants born to HIV-infected mothers initially test antibody-positive, about 70 percent will eventually test negative after developing their own antibodies. Because the only accurate information gained by testing the infant is about the mother's HIV status, such a policy does nothing to address the increased incidence of HIV in newborns and amounts to mandatory testing for pregnant women. Rather than waiting until babies are born infected, opponents of the bill argued that it would be far more effective and humane to require counseling during the prenatal period so that moms testing positive would have a wider range of medical, therapeutic and family-planning options. Mayersohn balked; it was her bill or no bill. There's still no bill.

Burkett's approach to the issue of prenatal versus postnatal AIDS care is, like Mayersohn's, grievously shortsighted. By characterizing the debate as a classic civil liberties dilemma, pitting the privacy rights of mothers against the health concerns of their babies, Burkett neglects a host of facts on the ground that thwarted the timely and effective treatment of AIDS in children and young mothers. She overlooks the limitations of HIV-antibody tests that can't tell us whether an infant is truly infected and fails to mention that other, more definitive tests are far too costly for widespread use. She fails to understand that diagnostic testing without access to adequate health care and support services accomplishes nothing and is a cruel hoax. Unfortunately, both Mayersohn and Burkett seem more interested in identifying those with HIV than in caring for them.

Writing a book about HIV and AIDS during the height of its second decade comes with a unique responsibility to reaffirm the epidemic's urgency, to highlight successes, underscore failures and shed new light on the emerging dynamics associated with increasingly diverse populations.

While Burkett knows the key issues—the distribution of funding, the evolution of community-based services, the scandalous state of biomedical research in America, prevention strategies for varied populations—she generally shirks thoughtful evaluation or constructive analysis. Her sweeping attack makes for an engrossing read, but it does little to counter the posture of malignant neglect that has allowed the crisis to continue, and deepen, for so long. *And the Band Played On* was a passionate call to action against public indifference and government neglect. There's no room for any such call to arms in Burkett's scorched-earth assault on virtually every program, policy and organization that has tried to minimize the devastation caused by AIDS.

"I had come to understand," Burkett writes, "that politics, greed and utter stupidity are making a mockery of the war against the epidemic." It's an astute observation; it's just too bad her book offers only more of the same. ◀

Jeffrey L. Reynolds is a freelance writer and serves as director of public policy for the Long Island Association for AIDS Care.

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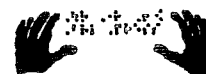
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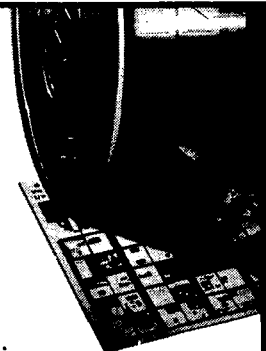
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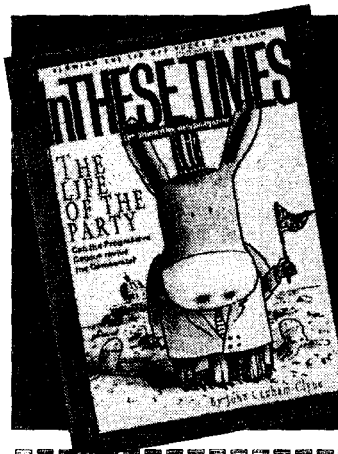
When Charles Keating gave her a donation of more than \$1 million, Mother Teresa knew nothing of his innovative approach to the savings-and-loan industry. But one of the prosecutors eventually wrote her a letter, revealing that the money was ill-gotten. "Most [of Keating's victims] were people of modest means and unfamiliar with high finance," he explained. "One was, indeed, a poor carpenter who did not speak English and had his life savings stolen by Mr. Keating's fraud." That reference to a poor carpenter might have been expected to elicit some glimmer of recognition from Mother T. But she kept the money anyway. Nor, it seems, would returning the money have really hurt the Calcutta poor. The Missionaries of Charity (Mother Teresa's ministry) applies only a small fraction of its enormous income to the relief of their suffering. The funds certainly aren't used to teach the Missionaries of Charity even the most elementary medical procedures. After using syringes, the sisters clean them under the cold water tap. People with terminal cancer are treated with aspirin. Most of the money sits in banks—some \$50 million, for instance, in a single Bronx checking account.

If their real purpose were to cure the sick, the Missionaries of Charity could build any number of good medical facilities using the donations squirreled away in various institutions. Instead, Mother Teresa's ministry is primarily concerned with fighting contraception in general and abortion in particular—which, in accepting the Nobel Prize, she called "the worst evil, and the greatest enemy of peace." And as vast sums pile up in accounts around the world, Mother Teresa begins to resemble a latter-day Saint Francis with an endless line of credit. Her ministry is poised to become a major religious order—offering the comfort of prayers, but rarely antibiotics, to the destitute of the Third World. The care for Mother Teresa's own health is left somewhat less directly in the hands of divine providence: Hitchens notes that she "has checked into some of the finest and costliest clinics and hospitals in the West during her bouts with heart trouble and old age."

This is but a brief sampling of items from Hitchens' dossier. The aggregate picture is far more grim. But Mother Teresa is—remember—a living saint, and that reputation provides a Teflon coating which no quantity of mere facts can dissolve.

Hence the tone of the book, which grows most bitter just when Hitchens' points are the sharpest. "Helpless infants, abandoned derelicts, lepers, and the terminally ill are the raw material for demonstrations of compassion," he writes. "They are in no position to complain, and their passivity and abjection is considered a sterling trait." Or as William Blake put it two centuries ago, more economically and more harshly:

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Fall from grace

By Scott McLemee



IN THE END

For several years now, at odd moments between appearances in *Vanity Fair's* heavily scented pages, Christopher Hitchens has been digging for dirt on Mother Teresa. This would seem an unusually sordid and vicious pursuit. After all, Mother Teresa embodies selfless charity and devotion to the poor. And even the most secular-minded find it difficult to criticize a living saint. But Hitchens certainly has the nerve for it. In the course of his bitter crusade, Hitchens has conducted himself in the most willfully offensive manner possible. He's nicknamed Mother Teresa "the Ghoul of Calcutta" and called her "a dangerous, sinister person."

To earlier editions of his muckraking, he's affixed decidedly profane titles such as "Sacred Cow," "Hell's Angel," and "Holy Terror." Now the vendetta reaches its culmination in a slim volume, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice* (Verso, \$12.95). Is nothing sacred?

Well, no. So let me drop the mask of righteous indignation, and recommend Hitchens's witty, informative, and (given the price) much too brief study in applied iconoclasm. Among his sources of inspiration for the project, Hitchens names his friend Salman Rushdie. And one readily imagines the little book to have been written in solidarity with the novelist—if not, indeed, from *fatwa*-envy.

Yet I doubt the most indignant response will come from people who share Mother Teresa's faith, few of whom will read the book. The title, with its thumb-in-the-eye rudeness, guarantees that. Rather, it will prove most wounding—and, so, genuinely unforgivable—for those souls whose religious views are, perhaps, diffuse, but who would like to believe that Mother Teresa incarnates goodness. Let us call them people of good will. They are not—all of them—leftists, or even liberals. But many of them are. Looking at Mother Teresa, they see (or think they see) another person of good will.

They will be very upset by what Hitchens describes. Mother Teresa has, across the decades, consorted with all manner of tyrants, reactionaries, and scoundrels. And she has a penchant for lavishing her kindest words on them. For instance, the thugish and unlamented Duvaliers taught Mother Teresa a "beautiful lesson" (in her words) during her visit to Haiti in 1981. Never before had she seen "poor people being so familiar with their head of state" as they were with Madame Duvalier. Within a few years, as Hitchens writes, "the Haitian people became so 'familiar' with Jean-Claude and Michele that the couple had barely enough time to stuff their luggage with the National Treasury before fleeing forever to the French Riviera."

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